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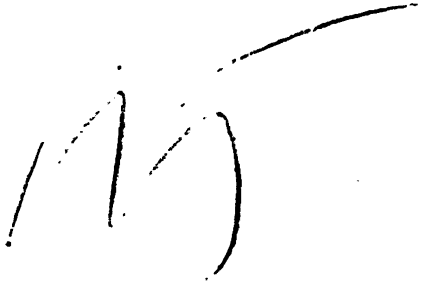
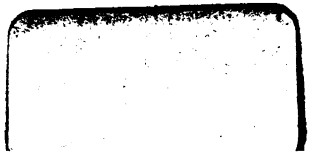
WAY-FARING MEN

EDNA LYALL





Mrs Edw. L. Graef

WAYFARING MEN

" Thou goest thine, and I go mine,
Many ways we wend;
Many days, and many ways,
Ending in one end.

" Many a wrong, and its curing song;
Many a road, and many an inn;
Room to roam, but only one home
For all the world to win."

—GEORGE MACDONALD.

WAYFARING MEN

A NOVEL

BY

EDNA LYALL pseud.

AUTHOR OF "DOREEN," "DONOVAN," "WE TWO,"
"TO RIGHT THE WRONG," ETC., ETC.

"Every man's task is his life-preserver. The conviction that his work is dear to God and cannot be spared, defends him"
—EMERSON

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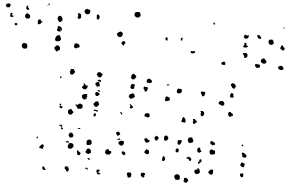

WAYFARING MEN

CHAPTER I

"So is detached, so left all by itself,
The little life, the fact which means so much.
Shall not God stoop the kindlier to His work,

* * * * *

Now that the hand He trusted to receive,
And hold it, lets the treasure fall perforce?
The better; He shall have in orphanage
His own way all the clearlier."

R. BROWNING.

"I WONDER what will become of Ralph Denmead," said Lady Tresidder, "it is one of the saddest cases I ever heard of; the poor boy seems to be left without a single relation."

"Yes," said Sir John, musingly. "Just the way with these old decayed families, they dwindle slowly away and then become extinct. There was no spirit or energy in poor Denmead, the man was a mere hermit and knew nothing of the world or he wouldn't have made such a mull of his affairs."

"Yet Ralph seems to have the energy of ten people," said Lady Tresidder, glancing as she walked at the river which wound its peaceful way through the park and reflected in the afternoon light the early spring tints of the wooded bank on its further side. At no great distance a boat glided swiftly over the calm water: in the

stern sat a dark-haired, handsome girl of nineteen, while the vigorous little rower seemed to be not more than eleven.

"Poor little chap," said Sir John, "he is terribly cut up about his father's death. I wish we could have kept him here a few days longer, but it's better that he should be put at once into his guardian's hands. There's no fear that Sir Matthew Mactavish will not do all that's right for him, if only for the sake of his own reputation."

"I suppose he is a very charitable man," said Lady Tresidder.

"Oh, yes, extremely charitable, and very well thought of. For myself, I frankly own I don't like the way in which he mixes up speculation and philanthropy, and I'm not at all sure that he was always a good adviser to poor Denmead. But he'll be kind enough to Ralph I've no doubt. The boy is his godson, and Denmead was one of his oldest friends. By the bye he was to be at the Rectory by five o'clock, and the boy ought to be there to receive him. They had better be landing, and Mabel can drive him to Whinhaven in the pony chaise."

He began to make vigorous signals to the occupants of the boat, who somewhat reluctantly came ashore and slowly mounted the rising ground to the house.

"Come in and have some tea while they are putting in Ranger," said Lady Tresidder, kindly. "Sir John thinks you ought to be at the Rectory when your guardian arrives, and Mab will like a drive with you."

Ralph grew grave at the thought of a return to the desolate Rectory with its darkened windows and awful stillness; he sighed as he followed comfortable motherly Lady Tresidder into the drawing-room where flowers and well-used books and a cosy tea-table, and some needle work, just put aside, gave a curiously homelike air to the whole place.

"Come and sit by me," said his hostess in that friendly

voice which more than anything helped him to forget his troubles. And perhaps it was the thought of the hard future confronting him which made Lady Tresidder glance so often at the little fellow who had outgrown the stage for petting, and who in spite of his smallness was really thirteen, innocent and ignorant of the world, and with a touch of the chivalrous gentleness of manner that had characterised his father, but in other respects just a high spirited, enthusiastic, hungry boy.

His honest brown eyes grew less wistful as he waded blissfully through the huge slice of Buzzard cake with which Mabel had provided him, but he found the good-byes hard to say, all the harder because of the kindness he received. It was only afterwards, as they drove up the steep hill in the park, and turned for a last look at the river, that he could remember without a choking in his throat, Lady Tresidder's motherly kiss, and Sir John's kindly farewell and cheery words about future visits, and the half sovereign with which he had "tipped" him.

There had been no particular reason why the Tresidders should have been so good to him. Sir John was not the Squire of Whinhaven, indeed Westbrook Hall was not even in his father's parish: but they had been practically Ralph's only friends ever since he could remember and some of his happiest hours had been spent with Mab, who being many years his senior and a country girl of the best sort, had been able to teach him to ride and drive, to fish, to row, and to care for animals as devotedly as she herself did.

Mab had a frank, hail fellow well met manner which contrasted rather curiously with her beautiful womanly face and delicately chiselled features; the world in general considered her somewhat off-hand and brusque, but she had in her the makings of a very noble woman, and the boy owed much to her companionship. They were

very silent as they drove through the park, but it was the comfortable silence of friends who have perfect confidence in each other. Ralph seemed to be looking with wistful eyes at every familiar turn of the road; his eyes rested lingeringly on the grey walls of the house down below, and the gleaming silvery river, and the old hawthorn bushes, and the fine old chestnut trees.

"Mab," he said at length, "may we stop for a minute, and just see the bullfinches? Look, there is one of them out of the nest and trying to fly; the cat will get hold of it."

"Why, to be sure," said Mab. "Will you care to take it with you to London? It is fledged and I think you could rear it. Would you like it?"

"Rather!" said Ralph emphatically. "And I have a cage at home that would do for it."

So the young bullfinch was carefully placed in a covered basket, and half an hour later Mabel Tresidder put down the two forlorn young things at the door of Whinhaven Rectory wondering how they would prosper in life.

A severe-looking old housekeeper came out at the sound of the wheels.

"So you've come back, Master Ralph," she said looking him over critically to see that he was clean and presentable. "That's a good job, for Sir Matthew has been here ten minutes or more, and the lawyer from London with him. Are you coming in, Miss?" she added glancing with no great favour at Miss Tresidder, and calling to mind how often in past days she had led Ralph through bush and through brier to the great detriment of his clothes.

"No, I will not come in," said Mab, "and this is not my real good-bye to you, Ralph, for I shall stay and speak to you to-morrow morning after the service."

She waved her hand to him, and drove swiftly off,

while old Mrs. Grice muttered something uncomplimentary about "new-fangled" ways, and not liking females at a funeral.

Ralph, meanwhile, had carefully hidden away the basket containing the bullfinch, and now stood in the little hall with a heavy heart. The quiet of the house was terrible, and the low murmur of strange voices in the study accentuated the misery and desolateness, which seemed to grow more and more oppressive every moment.

"For goodness sake!" exclaimed old Mrs. Grice, "don't stand there staring at nothing, like a tragedy actor, but go in and make yourself agreeable to the gentlemen; wait a bit, wait a bit, your hair's all rumpled up, not seen a brush since the morning, I'll be bound."

Ralph, made meek by his misery, obediently turned into the room to the right of the door, his own special sanctum where he had worked and played ever since he could remember, and having brushed his wavy brown hair into a state of immaculate order went slowly back once more to the silent little hall which was not even enlivened now by the presence of old Mrs. Grice. Nothing was to be heard save the ticking of the clock and the low murmur of voices from the adjoining room, not a creature was there to take compassion on the shy desolate boy. He looked up at the black representation of Lord John Harsick and Katharine his wife, which hung upon the wall above the old oak chest, and the tears started to his eyes as he remembered how he had helped his father to mount this rubbing from a brass, some two or three years before. The stately old couple stood there holding each others' hands, he fancied that they looked down on him with a sort of pity because he was left so utterly alone. He stood hesitatingly on the threshold of the study, dreading to enter, but at length impelled to move by a worse fear.

"If they come out and catch me here they'll think

I'm eavesdropping!" he thought to himself, and therewith manfully turned the handle, and walked in.

The study was in reality the drawing-room of the Rectory, a pretty room with a verandah and French windows opening on to it, and upon one side of the fireplace there was a cosy little recess where the Rector had been wont to keep his choicest flowers, and where the light from a little western window fell upon the marble bust of a sweet-faced woman—the mother whom Ralph could remember just in a vague dreamy fashion. Seated now at his father's writing-table was an old gentleman with a kindly, astute face, and remarkably thick white hair. Standing with his back to the fireplace was a middle-aged man whom Ralph at once recognised from the photographs he had seen as his godfather, Sir Matthew Mactavish. He looked up anxiously into the shrewd Scottish face, with its reddish hair just touched with grey, its keen steel-coloured eyes, its somewhat wrinkled forehead and ready smile. It was a powerful and an attractive face, but with something about it curiously different to the faces to which Ralph had been accustomed; the genial country squires, and the country parsons had nothing in common with this brisk, managing man of the world.

"Well, my boy," he said with a kindly greeting, "I'm glad to see you. You'll not remember me for you were but a little fellow when I was last here. Let me see, they call you Raphe, don't they?"

"Not Raphe, but Ralph," said the boy, and into his mind there darted the recollection of a scene that had once been funny but now seemed pathetic, of a discussion upon his name between his father and two old antiquaries, and of how one of them had patted him on the head with the gruff-voiced injunction, "If any one calls you 'Raphe' tell him he's a fool."

It was impossible to call such a man as Sir Matthew

a fool, and the boy turned to greet the lawyer, and was surprised to find that unlike the typical solicitor of fiction he was a very noble looking man of the old school, gentle and courtly in manner, and evidently understanding how embarrassing the interview must be to a lad of thirteen.

"Sit down, Ralph," said Sir Matthew, motioning him to a chair, "there are several things I must talk to you about."

Ralph obeyed, not without a curious sensation at being ordered about in his own home by a perfect stranger. "Mr. Marriott and I," resumed his godfather, "have been looking into your father's affairs on our way from London, and as a matter of fact they were pretty well known to me before. I grieve to say, my boy, that he has left you quite unprovided for."

"I—I knew," said Ralph, "that father had lost a great deal of money lately—it was through some company that failed: he told me he never would have speculated, but he wanted very much to make money and send me to Winchester and then to Oxford; he couldn't do that, you know, only out of the living. But he blamed himself for having done it; he said it was no better than gambling."

Sir Matthew had paced up and down the room restlessly during this speech, he seemed to be moved by it, and it was the lawyer who first broke the silence. "You are happy," he said to Ralph, "in having the memory of a father who was just enough to recognise his own mistakes, and noble enough to confess them. Be warned, my boy, and never in the future dabble in speculation."

Sir Matthew returned to his former position on the hearthrug. "In the meantime," he said with displeasure in his tone, "his more useful study will be how to live in the present."

"That," said Mr. Marriott gravely, "is a matter which you, Sir Matthew, will no doubt help him to consider."

Ralph, with a child's quick consciousness that something lay beneath these words which he did not altogether understand, glanced from one to the other in some perplexity. He saw that Sir Matthew was angry with the lawyer, and that the lawyer disapproved somehow of Sir Matthew.

"I wish Mr. Marriott had been my godfather," he thought to himself. "I like him twice as well. Sir Matthew orders one about as though he bossed the whole world."

And then, as often happens, he was forced to modify his rather severe criticism of his godfather, for Sir Matthew with a genuinely kind glance drew him nearer, and laying a hand on his shoulder, said in the most genial of voices:

"Don't you be afraid, my boy, I'll see you through your trouble. Leave everything to me. We'll have you a Wykehamist as I know your father wished, and then make a parson of you, eh?"

"Oh no, thank you," said Ralph, "I couldn't be a clergyman, I don't want to be that at all."

"Eh! What! you have already some other idea? Come tell me, for it's a real help to know what a boy's tastes are."

"I want to be an actor," said Ralph quietly.

"What!" cried Sir Matthew. "Go on the stage? Oh, that's just a passing fancy. No gentleman can take up play-acting as a profession. No, no, I don't send you to Winchester to fit you for such a trumpery calling as that. If you'll not be a parson what do you say to trying for the Indian Civil Service? I'm much mistaken if you have not very good abilities, and for a man who has to make his own way in the world, why India is the right place."

"I should like to go to India," said Ralph, thinking of certain tales of jungle life and thrilling adventures with man-eating tigers that he had lately read.

"Very well," said Sir Matthew briskly, "that's decided then. To Winchester for six years, then a choice of the Church or the Indian Civil Service. There's your future my boy, and I will see you fairly started in life whichever line you choose. To-morrow you shall come back with me to London, so run off now and let them get your things together, and Mr. Marriott and I will make all the necessary arrangements with regard to your father's effects."

Not sorry to be dismissed, Ralph made his way upstairs, where he found the housekeeper already busy with his packing. She made him collect what few possessions he had, two or three pictures, some tools, some books and a toy boat; but what she termed "the rubbish," such as bird's eggs, mosses, fossils, imperfect models of engines, and such like, she entirely declined to handle. "The rubbish" must be left, and Ralph with an odd sinking of the heart, as he remembered how short was the time remaining to him, began his sad round of farewells. He stole quietly up to the attic from which the harbour could best be seen, and watched the stately ships going into port. Then he walked through the garden with lingering steps; he had worked in it with his father so long and so happily that every plant was dear to him; to leave it just now in this May weather, when the Gloire de Dijon on the south wall was covered with exquisite roses, when the snapdragons, which as a little fellow he had delighted in feeding with spoonfuls of sugar and water, were just coming into flower, when the bedding-out plants, which but three weeks ago they had planted were actually in bloom—this was hard indeed! Could it be only three weeks since that half-holiday when, with no thought of coming trouble, they had worked so merrily together?

Passing through the green lauristinus arch he paced slowly on between the strawberry-beds now white with blossom. That Saturday had been their last really happy day, for the next morning's post had brought the news of his father's great losses, and though the Sunday's work had been struggled through, the Rector had never been the same again, the burdened look had never left his face.

Ralph thought it all over as he rested his arms on the little iron gate leading into the glebe, his eyes wandering sadly over that distant view which he had always loved, with its stretch of gorse and heather, and to the right the beautiful woods of Whinhaven park, just now in the full perfection of their spring tints. Well, it was all over now, and the place was to pass into the hands of strangers, and somehow he must get through his good-byes. Making his way to the stable, he flung his arms about the neck of old Forester the pony, choked back a sob in his throat as he unfastened Skipper the Irish terrier, and picking up in his arms a scared-looking white cat, ran at full speed down the drive, across the common, with its golden gorse and dark fir trees, until he reached the coastguard station. Beneath the flag-staff, with a telescope tucked under his arm, there stood a cheery-looking official in trim reefer and gold-laced cap. It was Langston—the head of the coastguard station, and one of Ralph's best friends.

"I have come to say good-bye, for to-morrow I'm going to London," said the boy hurriedly. "And I want to give you Skipper, if you care to have him. He's of a very good breed, father said, and he's an awfully friendly dog. And if you had room for Toots as well I should be awfully obliged. I know he's not worth anything, and ever since Benjamin was lost Toots has been sort of queer, always mewing and roaming about looking for him. But I think if you buttered his feet he would stay, and he's a real good mouser."

Langston promised to adopt both dog and cat, but he would not allow all the giving to be on one side. He went into his house and returned in a few minutes with a little pocket compass.

"I'll ask you to accept that, Master Ralph," he said, as he gripped the boy's hand in a friendly grasp. "You'll maybe have rough times in life, but steer well, my lad, steer well, and be the man your father would have had you."

"How does one steer if one doesn't know which is the right way to go?" said Ralph with a sigh.

"Why it's then that you'll hear your captain's orders," said the coastguardsman. "Cheer up, Master Ralph, it don't all depend on the man at the wheel."

CHAPTER II

"Ill is that angel which erst fell from heaven,
But not more ill than he, nor in worse case,
Who hides a traitorous mind with smiling face,
And with a dove's white feather masks a raven,
Each sin some colour hath it to adorn.
Hypocrisy, Almighty God doth scorn."

WM. DRUMMOND, 1616.

DINNER proved a trying meal that evening, although Sir Matthew and Mr. Marriott exerted themselves to talk, and were both of them very kind to their small companion. Afterwards they adjourned once more to the study where for the sake of the old lawyer a fire had been lighted.

"The nights are still cold," he said drawing a chair towards the hearth, and warming his thin white hands; "May is but a treacherous month in spite of the good things the poets say of it. I understand that your father's illness was caused by a chill," he added, glancing kindly at Ralph.

"He caught cold one night when they sent for him down in the village," said Ralph, tears starting to his eyes. "He was called up at two o'clock to see a man who was dying; there was an east wind, he said it seemed to go right through him. But then you know he had been very much troubled because of his losses; for the last ten days he had scarcely eaten anything, and had slept badly."

Sir Matthew paced the room restlessly, but when he spoke his voice was bland and calm.

"A noble end!" he said, "dying in harness like that; carrying comfort to the dying and then lying down upon his own death-bed; a very noble end."

Something in the tone of this speech grated on Ralph, he shrank a little closer to the lawyer.

"Why do I hate him?" thought the boy. "He's going to send me to Winchester with his own money, I ought to like him, but I can't—I can't!"

At that moment old Mrs. Grice appeared at the door asking to speak with Mr. Marriott. He followed her into the hall returning in a minute or two and approaching Ralph.

"My boy," he said, laying a kindly hand on his shoulder, "if you want to see your father's face again it must be now."

Together they went up the dimly lighted staircase to the room overhead, Sir Matthew following slowly and with reluctance, a strange expression lurking about the corners of his mouth. Many thoughts passed through his mind as he stood looking down upon the still features of his dead friend; if the pale lips could have spoken he well knew they might have reproached him; and yet it was less painful to him to look at the stern face of the dead, than to watch the grief of the little lad as, through fast falling tears he gazed for the last time on his father's face. It was a relief to him when the old lawyer drew the boy gently away, and persuaded him to return to the study fire.

"I will be good to his son," thought Sir Matthew as he looked once more at the silent form. "I will make it up to Ralph. He shall have the education his father would have given him. And then he must shift for himself, I shall have done my duty, and he must sink or swim. The very sight of him annoys me, but it will be

only for a few years, and, meantime, I must put up with it."

So Ralph for the last time slept in the only home he had ever known, and woke the next day to endure as best he might all the last painful ceremonies through which it was necessary that he should bear his part. When the funeral was over he left Sir John Tresidder to talk with the lawyer and Sir Matthew, and drew Mab away into a sheltered nook of the walled kitchen garden where stood a rabbit-hutch.

"These are the only things left," he said, mournfully. "Should you care to have them, Mab? I should like them to be at Westbrook for I know you would be good to them. Rabbi Ben Ezra is the best rabbit that ever lived, and he'll soon get to care for you. Sarah Jane is rather dull, but I suppose he likes her, and she doesn't eat her little ones or do anything horrid of that sort like some rabbits."

"I will take no end of care of them," said Mab; "but it seems a pity that you should leave them. Could you not take them with you?"

"If I were going to live with Mr. Marriott I wouldn't mind asking leave," said Ralph, "but there's something about Sir Matthew—I don't know what it is—but one can't ask a favour of him. I'd far rather give up the rabbits."

"Perhaps you are right," said Mab. "And by the bye Ralph, let me have your new address, you are to live with your guardian are you not?"

"They say Sir Matthew is not exactly my guardian. But father's will was made many years ago and he was named as sole executor, and father wrote to him the day before he died asking him to see to me. Here comes the man to say your carriage is ready."

"Very well," said Mab. "And tell Mrs. Grice I will send over for the rabbits. Good-bye, dear old boy. Don't forget us all."

She stooped down, and for the first time in her life kissed him, and Ralph having watched at the gate till the carriage was out of sight, suddenly felt a horrible wave of desolation sweep over him, and knew that he could not keep up one minute longer. Running down the road he fled through the churchyard never stopping till he found himself in a lovely sheltered fir grove—his favourite nook in the whole park; and here, while the nightingales, and the cuckoos, and the thrushes sang joyously overhead, he threw himself down at full length on the slippery pine needles that covered the warm dry ground, and sobbed as though his heart would break. They had always called this particular nook the "Goodly Heritage," because whenever friends had been brought to see it they had always said to the Rector: "Ah, Denmead, your lines are fallen in pleasant places." Poor Ralph felt that this saying was no longer true, he thought that the pleasantness had forever vanished from his life, and the prospect of going forth into the world dependent for every penny upon a man whom he vaguely disliked was almost more than he could endure. The boy had a keenly sensitive artistic temperament, but luckily his father's strenuous endeavours had taught him self-control; he did not long abandon himself to that passion of grief but pulled himself together and began to pace slowly through the grove crushing into his hand as he walked a rough hard fir-cone. And then gradually as he breathed the soft pine scented air, and watched the sunbeams streaking with light the dark fir trunks, and glorifying the silvery birch trees in a distant glade which sloped steeply down to a little murmuring brook, he realised that the past was his goodly heritage, his possession of which no man could rob him, and in thankfulness for the home which had been so happy for thirteen years he set his face bravely towards the dark future.

* * * * * * *

"Waterloo, first single, a child's ticket," said Sir Matthew Mactavish entering the booking-office an hour or two later.

"But I am thirteen," said Ralph quickly.

"Then he must have a whole ticket," said the official, and Sir Matthew frowned but was obliged to comply.

"You are so absurdly small," he said glancing with annoyance at his charge as they passed out on to the platform, "you might very well have passed for under twelve."

Ralph felt hot all over, partly because no boy likes to be told that he is small, partly because he was angry at being reproved for not standing calmly by to see the railway company cheated. How could it be that a man as wealthy as Sir Matthew could stoop to do a thing which his father in spite of narrow means would never have thought of doing? He could as soon have imagined him stealing goods from a shop as attempting to defraud in this meaner, because less risky, fashion. However, Mr. Marriott happily diverted his thoughts just then.

"Are you fond of Dickens?" he said kindly. "Have you read his 'Tale of Two Cities,' or his 'Christmas Tales?'"

Ralph had read neither, and was soon leaning back in his corner of the railway carriage, forgetful of all his wretchedness, cheered and fascinated, amused and filled with kind thoughts by the story of Scrooge, and Marley's ghost, and Tiny Tim, and the Christmas turkey.

It was with a pang of regret that he bade old Mr. Marriott farewell when they reached London, and illogically yet naturally enough he felt far more grateful for the parting sovereign and the kindly glance which the lawyer bestowed on him, than for his adoption by Sir Matthew. A sense of utter desolation stole over him as Mr. Marriott disappeared, and he followed his guardian into a

hansom and found himself for the first time in the heart of London. To his country eyes the crowded thoroughfares, the grim houses, the bustle and confusion, and the sordid misery seemed absolutely hateful; it was not until they happened to pass a theatre, and he caught sight of the name of a well known actor that his face brightened and his tongue was unloosed.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "does Washington act there? Is that his own theatre?"

"Yes, to be sure," said Sir Matthew; "you shall go some night and see him."

"Oh, thank you!" said Ralph rapturously; "how awfully good of you. Father took me once to hear him at Southampton, he was playing in 'The Bells' one Saturday afternoon. It was splendid; there was the dream you know, you saw it all before you. He dreamt of the court of justice, and all the time it was his own conscience that was killing him, and his remorse for having murdered the traveller in the sleigh. I thought I should have choked at the end when he believed they were hanging him; he just says, you know, in a sort of gasp, 'Take the rope off my neck!' and then he falls back dead, and the play ends. It felt so jolly to get out of the dark theatre into the street, and to find the sun shining, and everything as jolly as usual, and to know that all that dreadful misery wasn't really true."

"Not true?" said Sir Matthew reflectively. "H'm!" He looked with a sort of envy at the boy's clear innocent eyes, then he turned away; whether he were absorbed in his own thoughts or in the observation of the dingy crowd, it would have been hard to say.

They paused at a house in Bow Street where he had to make some inquiry, and Ralph fell into a happy dream about his latest hero the great actor, returning with a pang to the uncomfortable present when the hansom at length drew up at a house in Queen Anne's Gate.

Feeling very small and desolate he followed his guardian up the broad steps and into the imposing entrance hall.

"Wipe your shoes," said Sir Matthew, in his brisk authoritative tone.

Ralph obediently complied, and saw somewhat to his amusement that the same command was printed in large black letters on the mat.

"When I have a house of my own," he reflected, "there shall be a doormat with SALVE on it. Then the chaps will know I'm awfully glad to see them, and that I'm not thinking first of my carpets."

Sir Matthew, meantime, had been talking to a grey-headed butler; Ralph only caught the closing remark: "And let someone show Master Denmead up to the school-room."

The butler looked at the small lonely boy in his black suit. "Fraulein and Miss Evereld are out, sir," he replied unwilling to send this sad-faced little lad into the utter solitude of the upper regions.

"Oh, very well, then you had better come with me, Ralph," said Sir Matthew, and he led the way upstairs. The boy glanced nervously round as they entered. This was not one of the homelike, comfortable, used drawing-rooms such as he had grown to love at Westbrook Hall, but a great saloon upholstered in the best style of a well-known firm, and as lacking in soul and individuality as a Parisian doll.

There were several people present. Lady Mactavish a peevish-looking woman with small suspicious blue eyes and a nervous manner, shook hands with him and looked him over in a dissatisfied way as though mentally reflecting what in the world she was to do with him.

"Janet," she called turning to her elder daughter, "this is poor Mr. Denmead's son."

Janet, a somewhat sharp-featured clever-looking girl of four-and-twenty, came up and shook hands with him,

but her cold light eyes beneath the fringe of red hair, looked to him unfriendly. She just passed him on to her younger sister who was enjoying a comfortable little flirtation at the other side of the room with a middle-aged officer.

"This is Ralph Denmead, Minnie," she said, returning to her former place, and resuming the interrupted conversation with a lady caller.

Minnie, who was also redhaired, had a more friendly expression, she smiled at him as she shook hands.

"Fraulein has taken Evereld to her French class, but they will soon be home, and then they will look after you," she said, motioning him to a chair at some little distance from herself and the Major. It was a modern imitation of an antique chair, very hard in the seat, very high from the ground, and with rich carving all over the back which made any sort of comfort impossible. As he sat on it with his legs uncomfortably dangling, he saw the lady who was talking to Janet put up her long-handled eye-glass, and inspect him critically as if he had been some strange animal at the Zoological Gardens. However small schoolboys were not interesting, she soon put down the eye-glass and turned to Miss Mactavish with a question which arrested Ralph's attention.

"By the bye, have you read 'The Marriage of Melissa'? It is the book of the season, you must get it my dear at once, everyone is talking of it, and it is an open secret that Sir Algernon Wyte and Mrs. Hereward Lyne wrote it, though of course it appeared anonymously."

"What is it? A society novel?"

"Yes, and such a plot! There's a tremendous run upon it they say, and wherever you go you hear people discussing it."

Then followed a graphic account of the chief characters, and the most difficult situations; it was a plot which made the boy's ears tingle. He wriggled round

in his chair and tried to become interested in the vapid talk of Major Gillot and Minnie, it was doubtless very interesting to them, but to him it seemed the most insane interchange of bantering compliments and teasing replies that he had ever heard. Was this love making? he wondered. If so, they did it much better in books. It was not in this fashion that Frank Osbaldistone wooed Di Vernon, or that John Ridd made love to Lorna Doone.

He looked wearily across to the hearthrug where Sir Matthew was shouting unintelligible jargon about the money market into the ear of a deaf old Scotsman; then in desperation tried to listen to Lady Mactavish's grumbling voice as she related her difficulties to a soothing and sympathetic friend.

"You are always burdening yourself with other people's affairs," said the purring voice of the adept in flattery.

"Well," said Lady Mactavish, "you see my husband is one of those men who inspire confidence. They all turn to him naturally. And I do assure you he has a perfect passion for adopting children. There's this boy to-day. To-morrow it will be some other sad case. A little while ago it was Evereld Ewart, poor Sir Richard Ewart's little girl. You must see her by and bye. Yes, we have taken her in and her nurse and her German governess. It's been a very great anxiety to me, a great responsibility, though I make no complaint of the child. Still one likes to have one's house to oneself."

"And dear Sir Matthew," remarked the friend, "is fast turning it into an orphan asylum. But there it's just like him! so noble-minded! So ready to give and glad to distribute!"

There came a little interlude with the tea. Ralph handed about cups and hot scones which looked very tempting he thought. But there was no cup for him; evidently boys of his age were not supposed to feed in

the drawing-room. He returned to the mc
chair with its bony back and thought wistfu
drawing-room at Westbrook Hall, and wondered
Mab was at this very moment finishing that par
good Buzzard cake to which she had so lavishly
him yesterday. At lunch he had been too misera
eat, but now he was ravenous, and to be at once hu
and lonely and unhappy was a sensation he had never before experienced. How was he to bear this detestable new life? How was he to take root in this uncongenial soil?

His dismal reverie was interrupted by Lady Mactavish's voice: "Just ring the bell, Ralph. By this time she must surely be in." Then as the butler appeared, the welcome news came that Miss Evereld was at that moment on the stairs. Orders were given that she should come in at once.

Ralph looked eagerly towards the open door, and watched the entrance of a little girl who was apparently about a year or two younger than himself. She was dressed in a short black frock trimmed with crape, but nothing else about her was mournful, her nut-brown hair seemed full of golden sunbeams, her rosy face was dimpled and smiling; she seemed neither shy nor forward, but stood patiently listening to the remarks of Lady Mactavish, and old Lady Mountpleasant, as long as was necessary, then having received a warm greeting from Sir Matthew, who appeared to be genuinely fond of her, she caught sight of Ralph and crossing the room shook hands with him in an eager friendly way. The tide of general conversation rolled on, but the two children stood silently looking at each other for a minute or two. At last Evereld had a happy intuition.

"Are you not hungry?" she said.

"Yes, starving," said Ralph, with a pathetic glance at the scones.

"It's no good," said Evereld, noting the look. "We never have anything down here, but we'll try and slip away quietly. No one really wants us you see. And I'll beg Bridget to make us some hot buttered toast. She is the dearest old thing in the world."

"Does she live here?" said Ralph, as though he doubted whether anything superlatively good would be found beneath Sir Matthew's roof.

"She is my nurse," said Evereld. "We came from India you know last February. Her husband was a soldier but he died, and then she came to be our servant. Look, some more callers are coming in, now is our time to slip out."

Ralph gladly followed the little girl as she glided dexterously from the room, and it was with a sense of mingled triumph and relief that they found themselves outside on the staircase.

"Fraulein Ellerbeck and I have been talking all day about your coming," said Evereld, as they toiled up to the top of the house. "The telegram only came at breakfast."

"They must all have thought it an awful bore to have me," said Ralph, remembering Lady Mactavish's preference for having her house to herself.

"We schoolroom people didn't think it a bore," said Evereld, gaily. "You can't think how dull it is to have no one to play with. I could hardly do my French this afternoon for wondering about you, and once when the master asked me something about the difference between *connaitre* and *savoir*, I said, by mistake, 'Ralph Denmead.' It was dreadful! Everyone laughed." She laughed herself at the remembrance. "But, you see, I had been thinking how well we should get to know each other."

A comforting sense of comradeship crept into Ralph's sore heart; he forgot his troubles for a while as he looked

at the merry face beside him. It was what he would have called an "awfully jolly" little face, with soft curves and a dainty little mouth and chin, a rounded forehead from which the hair was unfashionably thrown back, and a pair of clear blue eyes that made him think of speedwell blossoms.

Evereld led him in triumph to the schoolroom to introduce him to her governess, and Miss Ellerbeck's warm German greeting, so unlike the chilly reception he had met with in the drawing-room, at once set him at his ease. Bridget, too, accorded him a hearty welcome, and brought in enough toast even to satisfy a hungry schoolboy. She was a motherly person, with one of those rather melancholy dark faces of almost Spanish outline which one meets with among the Mayo peasants. But not all her wanderings or her troubles as a soldier's wife and widow had robbed her of that delicious quaint humour which brightens many a desolate Irish cabin, and which brightened some parts of this great desolate London house.

CHAPTER III

"I do not love thee, Dr. Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell;
But this alone I know full well,
I do not love thee, Dr. Fell."

PRECISELY why the house seemed to him so dreary Ralph would have found it hard to say. It did not usually strike people as anything but a model English home. Something had, however, given the boy a clue, and already he vaguely guessed, what no one else suspected, that there was a skeleton in the cupboard. Little enough had fallen from his father's lips during those last days, yet Ralph had gathered an impression that in some way Sir Matthew was connected with that disastrous speculation which had ruined his father. He was far too young and ignorant to understand the matter, and even had he been sure that Mr. Marriott knew all the facts he could not have asked the old lawyer to explain things to him, for was not Sir Matthew his godfather? a godfather, moreover, who had generously undertaken to provide for him till he was grown up? He was ashamed of himself for not being able to feel more grateful, but that vague dislike and distrust which he had felt during their first talk at Whinhaven Rectory, only grew stronger each hour.

When the last guest had departed, Sir Matthew was beset by eager questions.

"Why did you adopt that horrid little schoolboy,

papa?" said Janet, reproachfully. "You are far too generous."

"My dear, you forget; he is my godson, and I couldn't leave him without a helping hand. His father entrusted him to me."

"They are all ready to sponge upon you, papa," said Minnie. "A reputation for generosity is a terrible thing."

"For a man's daughters, eh?" he said, laughingly. "Well, my dear, I don't want you to be troubled in the least. The boy will be going to Winchester in September, and we shall only have him in the holidays. As for little Evereld, we shall not be keeping her after her first season unless I'm much mistaken."

"It's true she is an heiress," said Lady Mactavish, critically, "but I doubt if she will make a very stylish girl. And she's far too conscientious to get on well in society."

"Well, well, we shall see," said Sir Matthew, easily. "Already she has one fervent admirer. Bruce Wylie makes himself a perfect fool about the child."

"He's old enough to be her father," said Janet.

"But she couldn't have a better husband," said Sir Matthew, in the voice that meant that no more was to be said. "Nothing would give me greater satisfaction than to see poor Ewart's daughter safely under the protection of a man like Wylie, before the heiress-hunters have had time to torment her."

"You remember that he dines with us this evening?" said Lady Mactavish.

"Yes, to be sure; let me have a list of the guests. And, my dear, remind me that I promised Lady Mountpleasant to open the bazaar for the Decayed Gentlefolk's Aid Society at the Albert Hall next month."

"We are no sooner off with one bazaar than we are on with another," protested Minnie. "Bazaars seem to me the curse of the age."

"Blessings in disguise, my dear," replied her father, with a smile. "The days of simple humdrum giving are over, and nowadays, with great wisdom, we kill two or more birds with one stone. To my mind, the bazaar is a most useful institution, and I should be sorry to see it abandoned."

"Ah, you would ruin yourself with giving, if I allowed you to do it," said Lady Mactavish, glancing up at him with an air of pride and admiration which for the moment made her hard face beautiful.

The words touched him, and as he left the room he stooped and kissed her forehead. Yet, on the way down to his library, an odd sarcastic smile played about his lips, and he thought to himself, "They have yet to learn that, had St. Paul been a man of the world, he would have added a postscript to his famous chapter, and said, 'For charity is the best policy.'"

In the meanwhile the schoolroom party were snugly ensconced in the window-seat overlooking St. James's Park. Ralph had been cheered by the sight of a regiment of Horse Guards, and Miss Ellerbeck had been beguiled into telling them stories of the Franco-Prussian War and of her brother's adventures during the campaign. By and bye, as the evening advanced, they were interrupted by the appearance of old Geraghty the butler.

"Sir Matthew would like you to be in the drawing-room before dinner, Miss Evereld," he said, "and I was to say there was no need for the young gentleman to come down. Maybe he's tired after the journey," concluded the Irishman, adding these polite words of his own accord, for Sir Matthew had curtly remarked, "Not Master Denmead, you understand."

"That means that Mr. Bruce Wylie is coming!" cried Evereld, joyously. "He's such a nice man, and he always brings me chocolate—real French chocolate. I never go down unless Mr. Wylie is there. You'll like

him, Ralph; he has such nice kind eyes, and such a soft voice."

"Well, you must run and dress, my child," said Miss Ellerbeck; "and I, too, must be wishing you both good-night, for I go, as you remember, with a friend to the Richter concert. We will light the gas for you, Ralph, and then you must, for a short time, make yourself happy with your Charles Dickens. Evereld will soon come back to you."

She bade him a kind good-night, and Ralph took up "The Cricket on the Hearth" and tried to read. But it would not do; the book had ceased to appeal to him. He threw it down, lowered the gas, and returned to the open window, leaning his arms on the sill and looking down through the bars at the dim road beneath, with its endless succession of cabs and carriages. For a little while it amused him to count the red and yellow lamps as they flitted by, but soon his sorrow overwhelmed him once more. It was the first time he had been alone since that morning hour in the fir-grove at Whinhaven, and now once more all the misery of his loss forced itself upon him. He was well fed, well housed, and his immediate future was provided for, yet, perhaps, in all London, there was not at that moment a more desolate little fellow. To be violently plucked up by the roots and for ever banished from that goodly heritage that had so far been his, was in itself hard enough; but to belong to no one in particular, to be planted down and expected to grow and thrive among loveless strangers seemed intolerable, and no ambitious dreams of a future in India came now to his help! He saw nothing before him but an endless vista of this same pain and aching loss. To-morrow would be as to-day, and all real happiness had, he fancied, gone from him for ever. There is nothing quite so poignant as a child's first great grief, though mercifully, like all acute pain, it cannot last long.

The passing lights down below had long ceased to interest him, but presently through his tears he happened to notice the pointers and the Pole Star, and found a sort of comfort in what had for so long been familiar. At any rate the same sky was over Whinhaven and London, and the motto which he could remember puzzling over in his childhood, illuminated in one of the Rectory rooms, returned now to his mind—"Astra castra, Numen lumen." It was true that the stars were his canopy, but was God his light? Had He not plunged his whole life in darkness, and set him far away from love and help and all that could keep a boy straight?

The Westminster chimes rang out just then into the night air, startling him back from his perplexed wondering. Ralph was not of the temperament that is liable to doubt. He took life very simply, and it would have been almost impossible seriously to disturb the faith into which he had grown up; the wave of wretched questioning passed, and he knew in his heart that just as over the great city with its debates and crimes, its sorrows and struggles, the bells ring out their message, so heavenly voices are ringing through the consciences of men, guiding, controlling, influencing all. Had not his father always said it was mere miserable cowardice to believe that darkness would triumph over light, that selfish competition would in the end conquer? Love was to be the victor. Love was to rule. And the great deep bell as it boomed out the hour seemed to his fancy to ring—"Love! Love! Love!" over the restless crowd of hearers.

In the meantime, however, his heart was still aching with the loss of the man who had been friend and companion, teacher and father in one. Surely since God loved him He would send some one to comfort him? Some one whose voice he could hear, whose hand he could grasp. For after all it was the outward tokens of love

and comfort that he craved, as all beings of a threefold nature must crave them. A spiritual love could not as yet suffice him.

Now as Ralph leant on the window-sill crying quietly, much as a soldier slowly bleeds on a battlefield because there is no one to staunch his wound, the schoolroom door opened. He had expected some one to be sent to his great need, but had pictured to himself a man. He glanced round into the dim room and started when he saw, instead, only a little white-robed figure.

"Of course," he thought to himself in his disappointment, "I ought to have known. It is only Evereld come back."

"Oh, it's you," he said, with profound dejection in his voice.

"Are you all in the dark?" said Evereld.

"I've been looking at the carriage lamps," he replied, evasively.

Evereld made no comment, she knew quite well that he had been crying, and a great shyness stole over her—a terror of not being able to reach him, and yet a consuming desire somehow to comfort him. She remembered that in her own grief grown-up people had always tried to soothe her with the adjuration, "Don't cry, darling." She had never found any comfort in the words, and of course they would vex a boy. Dick would have hated them.

"Do you know," she said suddenly, "in some ways you do so remind me of Dick."

"Who is he?" asked Ralph, still in the dejected voice.

"Dick is my brother," said Evereld. "He died last winter. There was an outbreak of cholera. On the Thursday father and mother died, on the Friday Dick and I were taken ill, and when I got better they told me he was gone. I was the only one left." Her voice quivered a little. She ended abruptly.

"Oh!" cried Ralph, like one in pain, and instinctively he caught her hand in his and held it fast. There was a silence. It seemed as if they did not need words just then.

Ralph had not found the strong man of his dreams; he had found instead a little girl with griefs greater than his own, and he felt a longing to comfort her and care for her, and as far as possible to be to her what Dick would have been.

"Was he older than I am?" was his first question.

"He was thirteen," said Evereld. "His birthday was in last September—on the 15th."

"And I was thirteen in September, too,—on the 9th," said Ralph.

"Only a week between you—how strange!" said Evereld. "And about soldiers he was just like you. When you rushed to the window this afternoon and saw all the little details about the Horse Guards' uniforms, that I never much noticed before, you made me think of Dick directly. He was crazy about uniforms, and Bridget used to make them for him. We'll get her to make you one."

"Do you think she would?" said Ralph, forgetting his troubles. "We could act all sorts of things then, you know. Do you like acting?"

"I love the dressing-up part," said Evereld, "I don't much care about the talking, Dick used to do most of that."

"I'll do that part," said Ralph blithely, for although shy and reserved with his elders, he was never at a loss for words in a charade, and the two instantly fell to discussing future plans, forgetting every grief and care in the bliss of perfect companionship.

"Let us come down now," said Evereld, presently. "Geraghty promised to bring us whatever we liked. We'll sit on the lowest flight of stairs, you know, and

he'll help us as the dishes come out of the dining-room. It's such fun. I always do it when there's a dinner-party."

Ralph consented willingly enough, and found something cheering in the general air of excitement that pervaded the house. They sat cosily on the rich stair carpet with its soft Eastern colouring, a funny little pair, he in his deep black, she in her white Indian muslin, watching the servants as they hurried to and fro, and enjoying what Evereld termed "that nice sort of late-dinner smell."

"But it makes one awfully hungry," said Ralph, and the good-natured Geraghty, catching the words, murmured a comforting assurance as he passed by, "I'm coming to you directly, sir," and in a minute or two with a beaming face he reappeared with two delicious oyster patties.

"How clever you are, Geraghty," said the little girl. "You always know just what will be nicest."

Whether Geraghty had much regard for their powers of digestion may be doubted, but he took a rare delight in tempting them with every delicacy, from prawns in aspic, to that curious dish called "Angels on horseback."

Ralph was half way through a huge helping of ice pudding when a momentary pang of doubt and reproach seized him. Ought he to be feasting on the very day of his father's funeral? Evereld saw the change in his face, and helped by what she had lately lived through, was able to read his thoughts. "Dick will be so glad that I've got you," she said, smiling, though Ralph fancied there were tears in her eyes. "I somehow think that your father and mine will be talking together to-night."

And those few comfortable words were more to the boy than any number of sermons on the resurrection; all his vague beliefs were freshened into living parts of his everyday existence, and for the first time he knew for

himself what had been to him hitherto merely things that others told him.

A sudden lull in the roar of voices from the dining-room now took place, after which the Babel of many tongues rose once more. "They are just beginning dessert," said Evereld. "That was grace, and in a few minutes the ladies will be coming upstairs. I think we had better go to bed now."

So they parted, after having arranged that in the walking hour on the next morning, they would go together and sail Ralph's little schooner in St. James' Park.

CHAPTER IV

"Of my grief (guess the length of the sword by the sheath's);
By the silence of life, more pathetic than death's!
Go—be clear of that day."

E. BARRETT BROWNING.

THE Park seemed dull and well-nigh deserted when, at about ten o'clock on the following day, Fraulein Ellerbeck and the two children made their way to the water's edge. Fraulein said she would establish herself on a seat in a sheltered nook not far off, and the children carried her book and her knitting-bag for her, chatting as they walked. Pacing slowly towards them was a figure which somehow arrested their attention.

"Why," said Evereld, lowering her voice, "it is surely the man we saw as *Benedick*, last March, Fraulein. It's Hugh Macneillie, the actor."

Ralph looked curiously and with great interest at a member of the profession which had such charms for him.

Macneillie was a man of about seven and thirty, with chestnut-brown hair, strongly marked features, and a muscular, well-knit figure. About his clean-shaven face there was an air of profound gravity which surprised Ralph, who could not conceive how a man capable of acting *Benedick*, and noted for his subtle sense of humour, could wear such an anxious and melancholy expression. He glanced at them with dreamy, absent eyes and paced slowly by.

Yet the little group had not been altogether lost on Hugh Macneillie in spite of the unseeing look in his eyes. He had carried away a curiously vivid impression of the two children, their black garments and their fresh young faces. He gave an impatient sigh, and paced on with quicker steps, yet turned again to walk by the side of the water, every now and then glancing at his watch with an air of vexation. He had been waiting there for a good hour, and he was in a mood which made waiting specially irksome.

"I will give her till half past ten," he thought to himself, and walked doggedly on, his face growing more and more haggard as the time passed by. At last the Westminster chimes rang out the half hour; he mechanically took out his watch again to verify the time, and setting his teeth hard turned to go.

At that moment there suddenly appeared, walking towards him, a very beautiful woman. It was difficult to say precisely in what her great charm lay. Her every movement was full of grace, and although she was dressed with scrupulous quietness—indeed with a simplicity that was almost severe,—no one could have passed her by without a lingering glance. Her complexion was pale but very fair, her hair was like spun gold, contrasting curiously with the brown, deep-set eyes; and though the mouth was a little too wide and betrayed a not over strong character, both face and manner were full of that indescribable fascination which carries all before it.

Macneillie, though he met her in the company of other people every day of his life, though he had known her for at least ten years, went to meet her now with his heart throbbing painfully. She gave him a charming little greeting, and apologised prettily for being so unpunctual.

"It is Elizabeth's fault," she said, glancing at the maid who accompanied her. "She allowed me to over-

sleep myself. You can wait for me on that bench Elizabeth, I shall not be long."

The maid walked back to the seat where Fraulein Ellerbeck sat with her knitting, and Macneillie, who had scarcely spoken a word as yet, broke the silence as they paced on together. "I had almost given you up," he said, a world of repressed impatience in his tone.

"That's the wisest thing I ever heard you say, Hugh," she replied lightly, though with a secret effort. "But you must go further. It must be not only almost, but altogether."

"Don't let us talk in parables," said Macneillie, passionately. "You can't compare an hour's waiting in a park with ten years waiting through the best part of a man's life."

A look of pain flashed across her face: there was remorse and tenderness in her voice as she replied. But there was not the love he had once heard there, and he knew it well enough.

"Poor Hugh!" she said, "I have treated you very badly. But how am I to help myself. We have waited for each other, as you say, these ten years, but you know well enough that my father and mother will never consent. They have made up their minds that I shall make a very different marriage."

"In other words," said Macneillie between his teeth, "they have made up their minds to sell you to the highest bidder."

"No, no, you are so exaggerated, Hugh. Every one can't look at the matter as you with your religious education in the Highlands look at it. Marriage is, after all, an arrangement affecting many people and interests. We are not living in a romance but in the prosaic nineteenth century. And I must not just please myself. I must think of what will best help on my career; my first duty is undoubtedly to help and to please my parents who have done so much for me."

"You didn't think so ten years ago," said Macneillie.

"Ten years ago I was a foolish girl of seventeen. You had been very good to me when the year before I had been taken straight from school and set down alone and friendless in a travelling company. It was natural enough that I should love you then, Hugh—you who shielded me and helped me."

"But later on," said Macneillie, clenching his hands, "when you no longer were lonely and friendless, when fame had come to you and all the world was at your feet, you very naturally needed me no longer, and your love died. Mine was never that sort of love—it will always live."

Christine Greville looked down with troubled face. Ambition and the importunities of her parents had for the time stifled her love. She felt cold and hard. His passionate constancy annoyed her. "I wish," she said plaintively, "you would not speak like that, Hugh. I hate to think that I have pained you, or spoiled your life; but what am I to do? What am I to do?"

He turned to her eagerly.

"Be true to your best self, Christine. Trust the man who loved you long before this Sir Roderick Fenchurch had ever seen you. I'm not blind! I can see the advantages you might gain by marrying him! You would be very rich. You could have your own theatre, you would leap at once to a much higher position. But do you dream that such a marriage would be happy? Why, you have hardly a taste in common, and he is old enough to be your father."

"Oh, as to happiness," she said, impatiently, "I have long ceased to expect that. Don't think me brutal if I speak plainly. I have had your love all these years, and it has not made me really happy. And if I married you, Hugh, I should not be happy at all. You are much too good for me, your standard of life is far too high. You

would not be able to draw me up, and I should be always longing to drag you down to my level. It would be a life of perpetual strain and tension."

"No, no," he cried passionately, and as he spoke he caught her hand in his as though he felt that she was slipping from him. "Together, darling, we should be happy, we should be strong to work for art's sake and for truth's sake—strong to fight all that is evil."

They had paused, and were standing now beside the railing that fenced off the grass and bushes, and within a stone's throw of Ralph and Evereld; half unconsciously Macneillie watched the progress of the toy boat as the soft summer wind filled its white sails. At a little distance the ducks swam about the wooded island, and in the golden haze Queen Anne's Mansions loomed up impressively like some great fortress.

"But I don't want to toil and to struggle like that," said his companion, petulantly. "Every word you say only proves to me how far we have drifted apart, Hugh. You have a sort of ideal of me in your mind not in the least like the true Christine. I tell you I am tired of all your ideals and aims and dreams of raising the drama. That is not what I care for. I care for success and applause—yes I do, don't interrupt me. I care for them, and I must have them. And I want a better position, and I want much, much more money. I want other things, too, which you can never give me. You'll never be a rich man, Hugh, it's somehow not in you; you'll never push your way to the very front of the profession. But I must do that, nothing but the very first place will satisfy me. I have ten times your ambition."

"By that sin fell the angels," said Macneillie.

"Don't quote Shakspere, we have enough of him every evening," she said, forcing a laugh. "And for me, I am not an angel as you very well know. Come, let us make an end of this useless talk. My father is at this

moment discussing settlements with Sir Roderick, and in a day or two all the world will know that the marriage is arranged."

Macneillie's lips moved but no words would come—he breathed hard.

"Don't look like that, Hugh," she exclaimed. "We shall often see each other; we shall be the best of friends; and when I have my own theatre, why you shall be the first to find a place in the company."

A look of hot anger flashed across Macneillie's haggard face.

"Do you think I would accept such a post?" he said, indignantly. "For what do you take me?" Then, his tone softening to tender reproach, "You don't understand a man's love—you don't understand!"

"Perhaps I don't understand it," she said, looking rather nettled; "but I have met plenty of men who were dying for love of me one month and raving about some one else the next. There, I must go home. Talking only makes matters worse. Go and take a good walk, Hugh, or you will act abominably to-night. *Au revoir!*"

She beckoned to her maid and turned away abruptly, anxious to put an end to an interview which had been trying to both of them. Her face was grave and downcast as she walked, and more than once she sighed heavily. She had never been formally betrothed to Macneillie, but there had been a private engagement between them, and she had spoken quite truly when she said that his care during her girlhood had shielded her from many perils. Her love for him had been very real; she had struggled long against the opposition of her parents, but at last her strength had failed, and little by little she had yielded to the influence which by degrees had paralysed her powers of loving.

"Poor Hugh," she thought to herself, remorsefully. "He is terribly cut up. But I was never good enough

for him. Sir Roderick and the low level will suit me much better."

After he was left alone, Macneillie did not move for some minutes. He just leant on the iron fence with clenched hands and set face, despair in his heart. The voices of the two children to the right fell on his ear, mingling strangely with his miserable thoughts.

"I shall lose her! I shall lose her!" cried the boy in a tragic voice.

"How came you to let go of the string?" asked his small companion.

"I had forgotten all about it; I was thinking of those people. Hurrah! the wind is shifting; she is coming nearer. I do believe I could reach her with my stick."

Macneillie watched the boy's strenuous efforts to recapture the tiny craft, which seemed almost within his reach, yet somehow always eluded him. Suddenly, at the very moment when his stick had touched the boat, he lost his balance and fell headlong over the low foot-rail into the water.

Macneillie had hurried to the rescue before Evereld's cry of terror had reached Fraulein Ellerbeck. He lifted out the dripping boy and laid him on the path, and Ralph, recovering from the shock and rubbing his wet eyelashes, looked up to find a grave face bending over him and to meet the inquiry of the kindest blue-grey eyes he had ever seen.

"None the worse for your bath, I hope?" said Macneillie, smiling a little.

"No, thank you," said Ralph, struggling to his feet and looking very much like Johnnie Head-in-air when "with hooks the two strong men hooked poor Johnnie out again." "It was awfully good of you to help me," he added, gratefully.

"And now let us rescue the boat," said Macneillie, winning golden opinions from the children by the real

pains he took to capture the *Rob Roy*, and the same from Fraulein Ellerbeck by his courteous farewell.

"So few Englishmen," she remarked, "know how to bow. You must take a lesson from him, Ralph."

"And, oh, Fraulein," said Evereld, as they walked briskly home, that Ralph might change his clothes, "did you see what a long time Miss Christine Greville stayed talking to him? And part of the time they were quite close to us, and we heard her say that soon every one would know she was to be married—I think, to some very rich man—and she would have a theatre of her own, and Mr. Macneillie should act there."

"You should not have listened, my dears," said Fraulein Ellerbeck, uneasily.

"But, indeed, Fraulein, we couldn't help it; her voice was so very, very clear, it reached us every word just like raindrops pattering on leaves."

"And so did his voice too," said Ralph. "He seemed quite angry when she said that. He said he would never accept such a post, and that she didn't a bit understand how he loved her."

"Well, well," said Fraulein, "let us say no more about it now; and be sure you never repeat what you accidentally overheard. It may be a secret from people in general, and it would be more honourable if you treated it as a secret."

The children promised that they would do so, but, like the celebrated parrot, though they said nothing, they thought the more, and Macneillie became their great hero. Through him they had both received their first glimpse into the unknown region where men and women loved and suffered; and, since they both were missing the familiar home life and the close companionship of parents, they seized eagerly on this new outlet for certain feelings of reverence and hero-worship which they both possessed.

Could the actor have known what sympathy and devotion these two felt for him, or how real was their childish love and admiration, he would have felt, even at that bitter time in his life, a touch of amused gratitude and comfort. Wholly unknown to himself he was filling the lives of two somewhat desolate little mortals, brightening their tedious days, and drawing them out of themselves and their own troubles.

Often, in after years, they would laugh to think what pleasure they had found in running downstairs before the breakfast gong had sounded, that they might get possession of the *Times* and see the announcement of "Hamlet," in which Macneillie was appearing. And one morning it chanced that their two smiling faces were still bent over the paper when Sir Matthew came into the room.

"Well," he said, kindly, "what good news have you found?"

For once Ralph forgot the shy stiffness of manner which usually crept over him at his guardian's approach.

"Oh," he said, in an eager boyish way, "We were just looking at the cast for 'Hamlet.'"

"To be sure. I had quite forgotten that you were stage-struck, and that I had promised you to go to see Washington. You must get Fraulein Ellerbeck to take you some day."

"We would much rather see Macneillie," said Evereld, "for it was Macneillie, you know, who helped Ralph out when he tumbled into the water."

"Very well," said Sir Matthew, "then do that instead. Fraulein Ellerbeck, will you take tickets for them?—and the sooner the better, for I hear there has been a great run on the seats there since the announcement of Miss Greville's marriage. She's to marry Sir Roderick Fenchurch at the end of the season."

Ralph and Evereld having poured forth delighted

thanks, discreetly kept silence when the conversation turned on Miss Greville's betrothal.

"They say, you know," said Janet, "that it is a great surprise to every one, and that it was always supposed she would marry Macneillie."

And in response to this every one had something to say about the probability or the improbability of such a story, save the two children who, with a proud pleasure in feeling that Macneillie's secret was safe in their keeping, went on eating bacon with the most absolute control of countenance.

When the eagerly awaited day at length arrived and the two hero-worshippers were sitting in bliss at the theatre, they found some difficulty at first in recognising Macneillie. He was just the Danish prince and no one else. It was only when both hero and heroine were called before the curtain, that they could at all think of him as the same man they had seen a few weeks before in St. James' Park.

As he led forward Miss Greville the contrast between them was curiously marked. She, with her smiling face, her air of perfect ease and content, seemed thoroughly to enjoy the warm reception. He, on the other hand, merely bowed mechanically, and looked as if this interlude were highly distasteful to him; the children could have fancied that he was positively nervous, though they doubted whether an experienced actor could really know what nervousness meant.

After that call before the curtain they lost the sense that *Hamlet* himself was actually present; always through the passionate scenes and the tragic death which followed, it was not entirely *Hamlet*, but Macneillie with his own personal troubles that they saw; they wondered much how he could get through his part, and more and more after that day his name continually recurred in their talk, in their games, and even in their prayers.

Just at the close of the season they saw him once again. Fraulein Ellerbeck had promised that on the first fine Saturday they should go to Richmond Park, taking their lunch with them. They had learnt from the conversation of their elders at the breakfast table that it was the very day on which Miss Christine Greville was to marry Sir Roderick Fenchurch. The marriage was to take place at a small country church, and was to be of a strictly private character. They had talked of it more than once as they sat at lunch under the trees in the park, and early in the afternoon as they wandered along the quiet paths and watched the deer grazing peacefully, their minds were full of their hero and his trouble. Suddenly Evereld gripped hold of her companion's arm.

"Look!" she exclaimed in a low voice. "Is it not Mr. Macneillie?"

Ralph's heart beat fast as he glanced at the approaching figure. Had their incessant thought of him conjured up a sort of vision of the actor? Or was it indeed himself? Nearer approach answered the question plainly enough. It was undoubtedly Macneillie, but there was something in his ghastly face which struck terror into the boy's heart, it reminded him of that awful shadow of death which he had seen stealing over his father on that last never-to-be-forgotten day. Apparently quite unconscious of their presence, Macneillie passed by, but in a minute Ralph, to the amazement of Fraulein Ellerbeck and Evereld, had rushed back and overtaken him.

"I beg your pardon," he said, panting a little; "but I am the boy you saved the other day in St. James' Park. And—and please will you take this knife as a remembrance."

He thrust into Macneillie's hand a little old-fashioned silver fruit knife which had belonged to his father.

The actor evidently dragged himself back with an

effort to the world of realities. He looked in a puzzled way at the boy and at the embossed handle of the knife.

"You are very good," he said in a perplexed tone. "Yes, yes, I remember you now—you and your boat. But I don't like to take your knife away from you."

"But, indeed, I never use it; I always eat peel and all," said Ralph with an earnestness which brought a smile to Macneillie's face. "We went to see you as *Hamlet*, and you were splendid! Please take it. You don't know how awfully I like you."

Macneillie's eyes gave him a kindly glance and his cold fingers closed over the boy's small hot hand in a hearty grip.

"Then I will certainly use it," he said. "It shall travel in my pocket for the rest of my life. But only on condition that you take this. Don't get into mischief with it."

And with a smile he put into his hand a clasp-knife, and while Ralph was still lost in admiration of the longest and sharpest blade he had ever seen, Macneillie passed rapidly on and disappeared among the trees.

"Oh, Ralph, how delightful!" cried Evereld, as the boy rejoined them.

"How could you be so brave as to go up and speak to him?"

"I'm awfully glad he took the fruit knife," said Ralph. "But I wish he hadn't given me this. It's such a beauty and I had done nothing for him."

"Perhaps you had," said Fraulein Ellerbeck, thoughtfully. "The unseen and unrealised help is often the most real help of all."

CHAPTER V

"The recognition of his rights therefore, the justice he requires of our hands or our thoughts, is the recognition of that which the person, in his inmost nature, really is; and as sympathy alone can discover that which really is in matters of feeling and thought, true justice is in its essence a finer knowledge through love."

"Appreciations," WALTER PATER.

SIX years after that memorable August day, Ralph and Evereld might have been seen on the tennis ground attached to the pretty house near Redvale, which Sir Matthew was pleased to call his "little country cottage."

It was decidedly one of those cottages of gentility which once caused the devil to grin. But in spite of that it was a very charming place. Its windows commanded an exquisite view over the hills and woods of one of the southern counties, and its gardens were the admiration of the whole neighbourhood. The tennis-lawn lay to the left of the house in a cosy nook of its own, and there was no one to see the vigorous game which the two were playing. This was a pity, for the play was skilful and dainty to watch, and the players themselves were worth looking at.

Ralph, who had been a remarkably small boy, was never likely, as Geraghty expressed it, to be "six foot long and broad," but he had developed into a well-proportioned, healthy-looking fellow, and still retained his open, boyish face, expressive brown eyes, and thick, wavy brown hair. Evereld was even less changed, she was still

very small and young for her age; and although she was fast approaching her eighteenth birthday she wore the sort of nondescript dress which girls often wear during their last year in the schoolroom, her skirt revealing a pair of pretty ankles, and her hair still hanging down her back.

The contest was an exciting one, but it ended in a victory for Ralph, whose greater strength usually conquered.

"I am heavily handicapped," said Evereld, throwing up her racket with a laugh. "We'll borrow the vicar's cassock and the Lord Chancellor's wig and you shall play a set in them and see if I don't beat you then!"

"Come and rest," said Ralph, strolling towards the little shady arbour at the side of the lawn. "The sun is grilling."

"You would find it worse if you had all this weight to endure," said Evereld, shaking back the cloud of nut-brown hair which hung over her shoulders. "I shall take to plaiting it up, then at least one would be cool."

"No, don't!" protested Ralph. "You'll never look half as nice afterwards. And besides, when girls do up their hair they always leave off being natural and get grown-up and horrid, and can't talk sense to a fellow."

"My hair has nothing to do with being natural," said Evereld, fanning herself with a big fern. "How could I help being natural with you, when we have been together all this long time? How I do wish I were a boy and might have gone in for the Indian Civil, too. By-the-by, Ralph, is that to-day's paper? Is there any news about your exam.?"

"They sent the wrong paper," said Ralph taking it up. "See, it's last night's *Evening Standard* instead of this morning's; they have been taking a nap down at the bookstall. I wonder if there really is anything in at last. It seems hard lines to keep us on tenterhooks from the 1st June till August."

"I don't believe you have worried about it. Your head was full of those private theatricals the moment the exam. was over. How well they went off! I never saw Sir Matthew so nice to you. He really did for once appreciate you."

"That was because other people praised me," said Ralph. "He would never have said one word of his own accord. You'll never find him committing himself before he knows whether he will be swimming with the stream."

"Ralph, do you know I think you are growing rather hard. I hate to hear you say things like that about Sir Matthew. If Fraulein were here she would have a hundred instances of his kindness to tell us."

"Yes she would," owned Ralph. "She has been our good angel all these years. Worse luck to that old professor who married her and left us to ourselves. Why, Evereld, just look at it in that way. What should you and I have been like if all this time we had only had the sort of indifferent cold charity which the Mactavishes have given us? Oh, I know there has been money spent on me; do you think I have ever been allowed to forget that for a moment? But Sir Matthew spoils with one hand the good he does with the other. Thank heaven, I shall soon be on my own hook. I wonder what life out in India will be like—and what the chances of getting any cricket are?"

Evereld fell to talking of happy reminiscences of Simla, and they were planning all manner of impossible arrangements for the future, in which they fondly imagined their present brotherly and sisterly relations would be maintained, when Bridget suddenly appeared upon the scene.

"Miss Evereld," she exclaimed, "you'd best be coming in to change your frock, my dear. Sir Matthew has come down without any warning from London. He's

in the library, Mr. Ralph, and they did tell me he was askin' for you. Geraghty he just passed me the word that he thought Sir Matthew was troubled in his mind about some little matter."

Ralph flushed.

"You see now," he exclaimed, turning to Evereld, "if I haven't gone and failed in that wretched exam.! What on earth shall I do if I have?"

"Why, you will go in for it again next year," said Evereld philosophically. "But who says you have failed? It may be nothing to do with the exam. Besides, you know that your coach and Professor Rosenwald and Fraulein—I mean Frau Rosenwald—all thought you were safe to pass."

"I know I had worked hard," said Ralph. "Well, let me go and hear the worst at once."

"Don't despair so soon. As for me, I believe you have passed, and that it is only some business matter that's worrying Sir Matthew. Good luck to you. Don't stay long in the library. I shall be dressed in ten minutes."

She waved her hand gaily and ran upstairs, while Ralph, with a great dread hanging over him, went to the library.

With other people he was invariably cheerful and talkative, but with Sir Matthew he was never his best self. To begin with, he was always ill at ease, and by a sort of fate he seemed destined to say and do exactly what would annoy his patron. If he was silent, Sir Matthew was in the habit of rating him for his dulness. If he laughed and talked, he was ordered not to make so much noise. If he hazarded an opinion he was sure to meet with a snub, and at all times and seasons he was hedged in by significant reminders that he was eating the bread of charity. It was well for him that he had

seen comparatively little of the Mactavishes, thanks to his life at Winchester and to his friendship with Evereld and her governess; but he had seen enough to do him considerable harm and to plant seeds of pride, and hardness, and distrust of humanity in his heart.

Sir Matthew was sitting at his bureau. He glanced up as the door opened, bestowed a curt nod upon Ralph and went on writing in silence.

"They told me you were inquiring for me," said Ralph nervously, noting at once the storm signals in Sir Matthew's face.

"I did send for you," said the master of the house grimly, as he signed his name with two flourishing M's, and methodically folded, directed and stamped his dispatch.

Ralph, horribly chafed by the manner of his reception and by the suspense, turned to the window and took up a newspaper which was lying near it.

"Put that down," thundered Sir Matthew, as though he had been ordering a child of four years old.

"Sir?" said Ralph, in angry astonishment.

"Do you think I don't understand your game," said Sir Matthew. "You are pretending to look for news of your examination when all the time you perfectly well know that you have failed."

"Failed!" cried Ralph turning pale, and realising how little he had believed in failure when he had talked of the possibility with Evereld. "Who says I have failed? Where are the lists?"

He snatched at the paper again, neither heeding Sir Matthew's orders nor his scoffing laugh. Here was the list of the successful candidates, and with eager eyes he looked down it. The name of Denmead was not there.

Sir Matthew silently watched his expression of bewildered despair, but though it would have appealed to some men it did not appeal to him.

"Now that the newspaper corroborates what I told you, perhaps you believe my word," he said sarcastically.

"I beg your pardon," said Ralph, "I did not mean to doubt you—but the shock——"

"Now my good fellow, you may as well be silent, the less said about a shock the better; you know perfectly well that you never deserved to pass that examination. You had idled away your time over cricket and theatricals, and now you have to face the consequences."

"You are the first person to say that," said Ralph, resentfully. "They all told me I had an excellent chance and was well prepared."

"The examiners, however, thought differently," said Sir Matthew; "your work was miserable. I have this very day been making special inquiries into the matter, that I may not judge you unfairly. You have not only failed, but failed ignominiously. Don't fidget about while I am talking to you; sit down and listen to me for I have much to say."

Ralph forced himself to obey in silence.

"I am perfectly well aware," resumed Sir Matthew, "that nowadays young men think nothing of failing, that they go in for an examination time after time with light hearts while their unfortunate fathers have to pay the piper. You were not in a position to behave in that fashion. And you would have shown, I think, a finer sense of honour if you had worked well."

"I did work," said Ralph emphatically. "If you——"

Sir Matthew raised his long hand and waved it downwards in a silencing manner that was peculiarly his own.

"I say nothing," he continued, in his cool, measured tone, "as to what I might have expected after the large sum I have thrown away on your schooling at Winchester; I say nothing as to the three months in Germany and the special coach I provided for you; I say

nothing of the manner in which I took you at once into my own house when there was no one to stand by you; I say nothing as to the fatherly care I have bestowed on you all these——"

He broke off abruptly, for Ralph, with the look of one goaded past bearing, had sprung to his feet.

"No," he cried passionately, "at least that word you shall not use; there was never anything fatherly about you. All those other things that you cast in my teeth though you say you won't mention them—they are true enough, and I have tried to be grateful—I—" he half choked in the desperate struggle between his pride and a certain sense of courtesy which still clung to him—"I will try always to be grateful." He strode across the room to the window, panting for air. A chuckle escaped Sir Matthew.

"You were always a good hand at acting," he remarked, "but I shall be obliged if you will come down from your high horse and remember that I am talking about a business arrangement. Don't waste my time, but listen to what I have to say to you."

Ralph paced back again to the hearthrug and stood there, looking steadily down at his patron. It somehow seemed as if in those few moments he had passed from boyhood altogether, even Sir Matthew noted the change in his look and bearing. "The only thing," he resumed, "in which I ever saw you really exert yourself was in that play at the end of the season. I quite admit that you learnt the part of *Charles Surface* at very short notice and that you acted it far better than any amateur I ever had the pain of watching. But to play a part in "The School for Scandal" is one thing, and to be fit to play your part in life is another. You will never, I am convinced, be sharp enough for the Indian Civil Service, I shall not permit you to go in again for it next year. I have already wasted too much upon you and shall not

throw good money after bad. That's always a mistake."

Ralph could not calmly stand by and hear his whole future overturned without a word; he broke in eagerly, perhaps rashly. "Yet many have failed the first time and afterwards turned out well," he pleaded. "The standard of age, too, is likely to be raised they say. I would work my hardest. If you will let me try again——" But once more Sir Matthew gave that expressive downward wave of the hand.

"No," he said peremptorily, "You have had your chance and lost it. Still, I am loth to turn my back altogether on an old friend's son, and for my own satisfaction I offer you one more opportunity. I will make a parson of you. Do you remember that snug little vicarage up in the north of England where last year we went to call on a Mr. Crosbie? Years ago the Mactavishes owned the living; it had been in the family for generations. My father at a time when he was pressed for money sold it to old Crosbie. I have long wished to have the property again, and only to-day Crosbie happened to be in town and I got him to promise me that if I bought the living he would undertake to retire in four years. You had better not tell it in Gath, for of course the promise to retire is a strictly private matter, but for the rest it's all legal enough. Next month you will be twenty. In four years you could be ordained priest, and I will undertake to see you through your training and to put you into this living. It's three hundred and a house; you could be happy enough up there, and for your father's sake I am willing to do as much as that for you."

There was something so artificial in those last words that Ralph, whose anger had been rising every moment, now broke forth indignantly.

"Is it for his sake that you put before me a temptation

of this sort ? You surely know—you must know—that my father would never have accepted a living obtained in that way. Had you offered it him, and had it been worth ten times the money, he would not have touched it with a pair of tongs. Why, the thing is rank simony! "

"You receive offers of help in a somewhat curious fashion, young man," said Sir Matthew with a sneer. "But in spite of that I still think you are very well cut out for a parson. Your dramatic instincts and your good voice would fit you well enough for the Church, and you are already able, I perceive, to preach to your elders and betters."

Ralph winced at the sarcasm, but he caught hold of the weak point in his opponent's argument.

"No," he said, emphatically, "I am not fit for the work of a clergyman. The only thing that can fit a man for that is a distinct call from God. You are tempting me to go in for the loaves and fishes, and you dare to say that you do this for my father's sake—my father, who would have starved first! "

"Perhaps he would," said Sir Matthew coldly. "He was, as all his friends knew, an unpractical fool. You needn't look as if you could kill me. He had excellent abilities but no power of pushing his way, and he left you a beggar in consequence, proving, according to scripture, that as he had neglected to secure future provision for his family he had denied the faith and was worse than an infidel. Now, to return to business; are you going to accept this offer of mine, or do you intend to be a pig-headed idiot, and affect to be calling a mere matter of business simony ? "

Ralph's eyes lighted up.

"I mean," he said quietly, "to be true to my father's ideals."

Sir Matthew broke into a discordant laugh.

"Did his precious ideals feed you and clothe you and

send you to Winchester? Don't you know by his own confession that he had mismanaged his affairs?"

"I know," said Ralph indignantly, "that, whatever his faults, he was at least an honest man."

He had meant no insinuation whatever, but the words galled his companion terribly. Sir Matthew rose to his feet in a towering passion.

"You impertinent, ungrateful fellow, do you dare to insult me in my own house? Go, sir, get out of my sight! I have had enough of you. Let us see now how your ideals will support you! Leave my house and never set foot in it again!"

Ralph, too angry and sore to realise all that the words meant, turned without a word and left the library.

CHAPTER VI

"The grace of friendship—mind and heart,
Linked with their fellow heart and mind;
The gains of science, gifts of art;
The sense of oneness with our kind;
The thirst to know and understand—
A large and liberal discontent:
These are the goods in life's rich hand,
The things that are more excellent."

WILLIAM WATSON.

THE moment the door had closed behind the boy Sir Matthew's anger cooled. For the time it had been genuine, for quite unintentionally Ralph had used words which stung him as no others could have done. There were two things in the world that the company promoter sincerely cared about—successful speculation, and his reputation as a philanthropist. His adoption of Ralph had been almost entirely a speculation, one of the specious bits of kindness which he had intended to redound to his own honour and glory. Having once undertaken the lad's education he could not for his own credit's sake turn back, but from the very first he had shrewdly guessed that it would prove a bad investment, and Ralph had been a thorn in his side. To begin with, the boy was in face curiously like his father, and Sir Matthew had some lingering remains of affection for his old friend, even though in his heart he despised him for not being more of a man of the world. He had not lived the life of a company promoter without having grown perfectly callous to the sufferings of his victims, but yet the con-

science that was not dead but dormant within him had been faintly stirred at Whinhaven when he realised that the Rector's ruin had been his work. Partly to salve his conscience, but chiefly because the world would applaud the action, he had adopted Ralph. The boy, however, had not taken kindly to the part assigned him. He never showed off well before visitors, never learnt to pose as a grateful recipient of unmerited kindness. On the contrary, Sir Matthew always had an uncomfortable feeling that Ralph saw through him, and knew him to be a humbug. As a matter of fact, the taunting allusions he had just made to Mr. Denmead's mistakes and errors of judgment had driven his hearer far from all recollection of Sir Matthew's actions or character; Ralph had thought only of that inward picture stamped indelibly upon his brain of the high-minded and scrupulously honourable father, who somehow seemed to him more of a living reality as he spoke than the angry, self-important patron confronting him.

"He was at least an honest man!" The words had intended no reflection on Sir Matthew, but they had gone straight to the company promoter's one vulnerable spot, and for the moment had sharply pained him. Incensed at the perception that this fellow might hurt his jealously guarded reputation,—that reputation for benevolence which was part of his stock-in-trade, he had burst forth into angry denunciation, and in one indignant sentence had severed all connection between them.

He took out a memorandum book now, and made an entry in it with much deliberation, then sat for some time wrapped in thought, gnawing absently at his pencil case, a trick which he had acquired, and of which the dinted surface of the silver bore tokens.

"One may trust a Denmead to be honourable," he reflected with a curious sense of satisfaction. "The boy will never mention that little private arrangement as to

Crosbie's retiring in four years. I have bought the living and now the question is how can I use it best to further my own ends? After all, it's just as well that this fool has refused it. I can use it as a bait for some one else, and I'm quit of Ralph for ever. Though the boy is so like his father in face there's much more go in him than there ever was in poor Denmead. He has a bit of the sturdy pluck and energy of his little Welsh mother. Pshaw! I needn't trouble about him. He's the sort that will swim and not sink, and a little course of starvation will bring him down from his impossible heights and teach him that he must do as other men do."

With that he rose and left the library in search of his wife, and having chatted pleasantly enough with her at afternoon tea, he casually alluded to Ralph's departure.

"What!" said Lady Mactavish, "Is he going out to India, do you mean."

"Not that I know of," said Sir Matthew with a laugh. "He has failed ignominiously in his examination, and has been most insufferably impertinent to me. I have given him his *congé*, and he will trouble us no more."

"The ungrateful boy!" said Lady Mactavish indignantly, "after all that you have done for him too."

"He has behaved very badly," said Sir Matthew; "and I think, my dear, we are well quit of him. I shall not see him again, but you had better just say good-bye to him, and by-the-by, I think you might give him a couple of five-pound notes; I should be sorry to launch him into the world without a penny in his pockets. It might make people think that I had been harsh with him."

Ralph had gone straight up to the schoolroom in search of Evereld, but something had delayed her and he found the place deserted. Throwing himself down on the window-seat, he let the soft west wind cool his flushed face and tried to think calmly over the interview with Sir Matthew. The attack on his father had angered

him as nothing else could have done, and it was over this rather than over his own future that he mused. The sound of Evereld's voice singing in the passage roused him, but before she had reached the schoolroom, the red baize door leading from the other part of the house creaked on its hinges, and Lady Mactavish appeared upon the scene.

"I was looking for you, Ralph," she said, entering the room in front of Evereld. "I learn, to my great annoyance, that you have failed in your examination, failed ignominiously. It is quite clear to us all that you have not been working properly."

"But every one says that the Indian Civil is such a dreadfully stiff exam.," said Evereld, "and he did work very hard in Germany; they all said so."

"Don't interrupt me, my dear," said Lady Mactavish. "It is not a matter you can understand. After all that Sir Matthew has done for you, Ralph, I think at least you might have behaved properly to him. He tells me that you were so impertinent that he has been forced to order you out of the house."

"I had no intention of being rude," said Ralph, standing before her with much the same expression of impatience, curbed by a sense of obligation with which he had always taken her fault-finding.

"I am quite aware that your intentions are always, according to your own account, immaculate," she said scathingly, "but, unfortunately, your words and actions don't correspond with them. You have behaved abominably to the man who has fed, and clothed, and housed you all these years, a man who has wasted hundreds of pounds on your schooling."

"Believe me, I do not forget what he has done for me," said Ralph eagerly. "I am grateful for it. But he used words of my father which were cruel, words which no son could patiently have listened to."

"Nothing can excuse the way you have behaved," said Lady Mactavish, "so say no more about it. What are your plans?"

"I have made none," said Ralph, "except to go by the six o'clock train."

"Where are you going?"

"To London," he replied.

Lady Mactavish glanced at him a little uneasily. She could not without prickings of conscience think of turning this boy adrift.

"Sir Matthew, with his usual kindness and generosity, asked me to give you these," she said, holding out the bank notes. "Though you have so much disappointed and pained him, he will not let you be sent away without money."

But Ralph drew back; there was a look in his eyes which half frightened Evereld.

"Thank you," he said, "but I cannot take them; after what passed just now in the library it is out of the question."

Lady Mactavish looked uncomfortable. "You have been so shielded and cared for that you don't realise what the world is. You will certainly be getting into trouble. I desire you to take these."

"I am sorry to refuse you anything," he said with studied politeness. "But you ask what is impossible."

"Your pride is perfectly ridiculous," she said, turning away with a look of annoyance. "However, I shall retain these notes for you, and when you have realised your foolishness, you can write and ask me for them."

Something in her tone, touched Ralph. It seemed to him that perhaps after all she had taken some little thought for his well-being, and that behind her grumbling, ungracious manner, there was more real heart than he had dreamed.

"Will you not let me say good-bye to you?" he said. "You must not think I am ungrateful for the home you have given me all these years."

She took leave of him more kindly than he had expected, after which he turned thoughtfully back into the schoolroom, where he found poor Evereld sobbing her heart out.

"Oh, don't cry," he said as if the sight of her tears had added the last straw to his burden. "It can't be helped, Evereld, and after all, had I got through my exam. I should have been going abroad before so very long. And you are going to school for a year. There will be no end of friends for you there."

"They won't be like you," sobbed Evereld, "You are just like my brother now. Oh, how I wish we were really brother and sister, then they couldn't turn you out like this."

"I wish we were," said Ralph with a sigh, as he realised how utterly he had now cut himself off from intercourse with her. All we can do, I suppose, is to hear of each other through the Professor and Frau Rosenwald. They will never let me write to you at school. It's not as if I were your brother really or even your cousin. They're awfully strict at schools about that."

"Well," said Evereld, resolutely drying her eyes, "We can write in the holidays, and in a little more than three years' time I can do just exactly what I like. Promise, Ralph, that you will come to me when I am one and twenty. Promise me faithfully."

"I promise," he said. But as he spoke it seemed to him that by that time a thousand things might have happened to divide them. He had a perception somehow that, once broken, that brotherly and sisterly intimacy could never again be the same thing. Later on, Evereld knew that it was indeed at an end, but for the moment his promise cheered her, and she set herself to

work to make the most of the present. "Come," she said, "tea is getting cold, and you must eat all you can, for who knows where you will dine. Oh, Ralph! what do you mean to do? Where shall you go in London?"

"I think I shall go first to my father's solicitor, old Mr. Marriott. He was kind to me when I left Whinhaven, and he will know the whole truth about things, and will perhaps advise me."

"Shall you go in for the Indian Civil again?"

"I don't think so, for most likely all that part is true enough. I must have failed badly; I never was any good at exams. No, I have a great idea of trying my luck on the stage. That was always my wish since the day when my father took me to see Washington. We often laughed over the plan and discussed it, and he had none of that horror of the stage which so many parsons profess to have."

"That would be delightful,—a thousand times better than going to India! And perhaps we shall go to see you act. And oh! perhaps you'll get to know Macneillie!"

"I have no idea where Macneillie has gone to," said Ralph. "He has not played in London for the last six years; somebody told me he had started a Company of his own in the provinces. It wouldn't be a bad idea to find out, and write to him. Unless our hero-worship threw a very deceptive halo round him, he must be an awfully kind-hearted man. Come! drink to my good fortune, and then like an angel just help me to sort out my things. Tea, and this notion of yours about Macneillie make me feel like a giant refreshed. After all, it will be jolly enough to be on one's own hook after eating the bitter bread of charity all this time."

"Yet I rather wish you had taken those bank notes," said Evereld. "How much money have you, Ralph, to start with?"

He felt in one pocket and produced a florin. "That will take me to London," he said. He felt in another and produced half a sovereign, "on that I can live for a week," he remarked.

"And after that?" said Evereld.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"There are night refuges I believe, where for a penny one can lie in a box and warm oneself with a leather coverlet. And failing these, there is always the Park, where you can enjoy part of a bench without any charge at all."

"Ralph, I'm not going to allow it," said Evereld, her firm little mouth assuming its most resolute expression. "Do you think I should have let Dick go away to starve upon twelve shillings while I was lapped in luxury? I took you for my brother, the very first night you came, and I'm not going to give you up, whatever you say." She unlocked her desk and took out four sovereigns. "This is all I have left of my allowance; I wish it were bank notes like the ones you refused. But you can't refuse mine, Ralph."

He hesitated. "I don't think I ought to take them," he said.

"Why not?"

"The world would be shocked. What right have I to your money?"

"Every right, since we belong to each other. And as to the world it has nothing whatever to do with the matter. Don't waste time, Ralph. Please take it for my sake."

He could not resist the blue eyes brimming with tears, but let her place the money in his hand and gave her a brotherly hug. Then they hastily began to collect his possessions, talking bravely of the future, and many times alluding to their old hero Macneillie.

In the meantime in Geraghty's pantry two other

friends were colloguing; Bridget having learnt the fate that was to befall her young gentleman was opening her heart to her elderly *fiancé*.

"It's turnin' of him out that they're after," she said indignantly, "And him a fine handsome boy and knowin' just nothin' of the world. Sure thin, Geraghty, it's a sin, it's just a mortal sin, and him without connictions, let alone relations."

"Where will he be goin'?" asked Geraghty thoughtfully.

"I heard them say he was goin' to London, and you know what that will be meanin' when a boy's got neither money nor friends to keep him in the right way. It breaks me heart to think of it."

"Well, maybe I'd better be tellin' him of Dan Doolan's house at Vauxhall. He'd be with good dacent folk there and they'd not be askin' a high rint. Here, give me that tray. I'll fetch down the schoolroom cups for ye, and that'll give me a chance to speak with him."

Geraghty had always been a favourite in the schoolroom, and Ralph turned to the old fellow now with a hearty appreciation of his kindly thoughtfulness.

"We shall all miss you, Mr. Ralph," he said. "And if I might make so bold as to be giving you the ricommindation of some rooms in London, where they tell me you're going, I think you'd find them respectable, which is more than can be said for many places. The house belongs to Dan Doolan, that's my sister's husband's uncle, he and his wife are very dacent folk and they would do their utmost for you and give you a warm welcome."

"Trust the Irish for that," said Ralph, "I'm very much obliged to you, Geraghty, for I hadn't an idea where to look for lodgings. Come, Evereld, now you will feel much happier about me."

He took down the address, and then, with the help of

Geraghty and Bridget and Evereld, the packing was finished and the moment of leave-taking arrived. The butler had carried down the last portmanteau, Bridget had invoked blessings on his head and gone away wiping her eyes with her apron, and the two friends were left in the quiet schoolroom.

"Remember your promise," said Evereld earnestly.

"I will remember," said Ralph. "And after all it is likely enough that we shall meet before that. Courage, dear! Don't fret. The time will soon pass."

"Here is a book for you to read in the train," she added, afraid to say much, lest she should break down. "You must have a Dickens to comfort you, and this will be the best, for the wind is very much in the east to-day, as dear old Mr. Jarndyce would have said."

She gave him her own copy of "Bleak House" and Ralph, with a choking sensation in his throat, bent down and kissed the sweet rosy face that was still so childlike. After that, without another word, he left the house, and Evereld, running to her bedroom, watched him until he had disappeared in the distance, then, throwing herself on the bed, cried as though her heart would break.

CHAPTER VII

"Is our age an age of genuine pity? I have my doubts. It is pre-eminently an age of bustle, and fuss, and fidget; but I think we are lacking in tenderness."—DR. JESSOP.

AFTER the pain of his farewells had begun to wear off a little, Ralph, being naturally of a hopeful temperament, turned not without some pleasurable feelings to the thought of the future that lay before him. More and more his old dreams of becoming an actor filled his mind, and in the sudden change which had befallen his fortunes he saw something not unlike a distinct call to return to his first ideal. He clung all the more to the thought because of the uprooting he had just undergone, and as he travelled through the Surrey hills on that summer evening, found comfort in the anchorage of a firm resolve to do all that was in his power to fit himself for his new vocation. That one did not climb the ladder at a bound he of course knew well enough, and he had sense to guess that it would be a difficult matter to get room even on the lowest step of the ladder. A hard struggle lay before him, but he was full of vigorous young life and did not shrink from the prospect. Then, too, he was keenly conscious of the relief of no longer depending upon the Mactavishes. He could exactly sympathise with Esther in "Bleak House," who was always sensible of filling a place in her godmother's establishment which ought to have been empty. It was something after all to be free, even though not precisely knowing how he was to keep body and soul together.

With the exception of old Mr. Marriott there seemed few to whom he could apply for advice. His late master at Winchester was away in Switzerland; the Professor and Frau Rosenwald were in Dresden and were little likely to be able to help him, while of friends of his own age he had scarcely any, owing to Lady Mactavish's dislike to his accepting invitations for the holidays which would have made return invitations necessary.

On reaching Charing Cross he went straight to Sir Matthew's house in Queen Anne's Gate, left his luggage there, arranged to come the next day and pack the few things he had in his room, and then walked to Ebury Street to inquire whether Mr. Marriott were at home. London had such a deserted air that he began to fear that the solicitor would have joined in the general exodus. But fortune favoured him, Mr. Marriott was in town still and had just returned from the City. He was ushered into a comfortable library, where, in a few moments, the old lawyer joined him, receiving him in such a kindly and courteous way that the friendless feeling which had taken possession of him on his arrival in London quite left him.

"I hope you will excuse my coming at such an hour and to your private house, but I half feared you might be away and I was very anxious for your advice," he said, when the old man's greetings were ended.

"I'm heartily glad you did come to-night," said Mr. Marriott. "For to-morrow I go to Switzerland with my sister and my daughter. Is Sir Matthew still in town? Are you staying with him?"

"He has this very day turned me out of his house," said Ralph, and he briefly told the lawyer what had passed.

"This seems a serious matter," said Mr. Marriott. "We must talk it over together, but in the meantime, I will send round for your things, and you will, I hope,

spend the night here. After dinner, we will put our heads together, and see what can be done."

Ralph could only gratefully accept the hospitality, and it proved to be just the genuine old-fashioned hospitality that does the heart good, and is as unlike its forced counterfeit as real fruit is unlike its waxen imitation.

Old Mr. Marriott's sister proved to be one of those eternally young people who at seventy have more capacity for enjoying life than many girls of eighteen. Her vivacious face, with its ever varying expression, her kindly human interest in all things and all people, did more to drive bitter recollections from Ralph's mind than anything else could have done. Moreover, he lost his heart to pretty Katharine Marriott, though she was many years his senior. Her large, serious, brown eyes, and her air of gentle dignity seemed to him perfection; he could have imagined her to be some stately Spanish lady in her black, lace dress, and though she said little to him, her whole manner was full of sympathetic charm. When the ladies had left the table, Mr. Marriott began to make further inquiries as to what had passed that afternoon.

"Is it not possible," he suggested, "that you too readily took Sir Matthew at his word? He has been kind to you all these years, has he not?"

"He has carried out what he undertook," said Ralph, "and twice, no—three times—I remember that he really spoke kindly to me. For the rest of the six years he has never noticed me at all except to find fault."

"Do you mean that you got into trouble? That your school reports were bad or anything of that sort?"

"No, they were decent enough, and I was never exactly in any scrape, but somehow, in little ways I always managed to displease him; spoke too much, or too little, or too loud, or not distinctly. If one made the least

strong for him. He murdered my father just as truly as if he had stabbed him to the heart. It was not the cold that killed him, it was the misery and the depression and the anxiety for the future. And this false friend of his is the man that goes about opening bazaars, and posing as a profoundly religious man! Faugh! It's revolting!"

"I have never liked Sir Matthew Mactavish," said Mr. Marriott, quietly. "It is wonderful to me how he impresses people; there must be some germ of greatness in him or he couldn't do it. I am quite aware that the discovery of the truth must make you feel very bitterly towards him, but if you will take an old man's advice you will dwell upon the past as little as possible. You can do no good by thinking of the injury he has done you, and you will have to be very careful how you speak of him, or in an angry moment you may make yourself liable to an action for slander; legally you know a thing may be perfectly true, but if maliciously uttered and in a way that injures another in his calling it may be nevertheless slander. So you must not proclaim your wrongs from the housetops. Now the question is what are you to do to support yourself?"

"I want to try my luck on the stage," said Ralph. "It was my wish long ago, and I believe that I might make something of it. I shall never be much good at examinations."

"It seems rather the fashion for young fellows to try it nowadays," said the lawyer, "but I should think the life was a very hard one, and like all other callings in this country it is much overcrowded. Still you might do worse. I will give you a letter to Barry Sterne; he is a client of mine and might possibly be able to help you. At any rate he would give you his advice."

Ralph caught at the suggestion, and when the next morning the Marriotts started for Switzerland they left him in excellent spirits.

"Are you quite sure you have enough to live on until you get work," asked the old lawyer, drawing him aside at the last moment. "I will gladly lend you something."

"Thank you," replied Ralph. "But I have enough to live on till the end of September."

"And by that time we shall be in London again," said Mr. Marriott. "Be sure you come to see us and let us know how you prosper."

It was not without some trepidation that later in the morning Ralph presented himself at the house of Barry Sterne, the great actor. He sent in Mr. Marriott's letter of introduction and waited nervously in a small back sitting-room, the window of which opened into one of those miniature ferneries which one associates with the operating room of a dentist. Three dejected gold-fish swam aimlessly up and down the narrow tank, and the ferns looked as if they pined for country air. It was a relief when at length he was summoned into the adjoining room. Here the sun was shining, and there was a general sense of ease and comfort, Barry Sterne himself harmonising very well with his setting, for he was a good-natured looking giant with a most genial manner, and his broad, expansive face beamed in a very kindly fashion on his visitor.

"I'm afraid I can't do anything for you," he said, but the words carried no sting because the tone was so delightful. "I have hundreds of these applications, and it's about the most disagreeable part of my life to be for ever saying 'no' to people."

He put a few questions to him, all the while observing him attentively with his keen eyes.

"Well, you see," he remarked, leaning back easily in his chair and telling off the various items on his fingers as he proceeded. "Things seem to me to stand like this. You have a good presence, a good voice, a good

manner; but you have no experience, you have had no special preparation, you have no money, and you have no friends or relatives in the profession. There are three points for you and four against you. That means that you will have a very hard struggle, and will have to be content to take any mortal thing you can get. Are you prepared for that?"

"I am prepared to begin at the very bottom of the profession if only it will give me a real chance of getting on," said Ralph.

"To make a fool of yourself in a pantomime, for instance," said the actor, eyeing him keenly. "Or to walk on and say nothing in a piece that runs for a couple of hundred nights?"

"Yes, I would do it," said Ralph, thoughtfully. "If, in the meantime, I was really learning and making some way."

"Right," said Barry Sterne. "That's the way to set to work. But as a rule a gentleman thinks he must step into the first ranks of the profession straight away, which is a confounded mistake. I'll write you a note of introduction to Costa, the agent. You may thoroughly trust him, and he may perhaps be able sooner or later to put you in the way of something. I wish I knew of any opening for you. But I'm off to America next month with Miss Greville's Company."

The name instantly recalled Macneillie to Ralph's mind.

"When I was a small boy," he said, "Mr. Macneillie was once very good to me. If he were in London still, I might have gone to him. Do you know what has become of him."

"Hugh Macneillie? Why he would be precisely the man for you. He went to America about six years ago, had a tremendous success over there, and when he came back to England started a travelling company of his own.

Oh, Macneillie is a sterling fellow, you couldn't do better than try to get in with him. Costa will be able to tell you his whereabouts."

After that, with a few kindly words and good wishes, Ralph found himself dismissed.

The day was intensely hot; however, he set off at once for the agent's, handed in Barry Sterne's letter, was sharply scrutinised by Costa's keen Jewish eyes, and had his name entered upon the books, after paying five shillings.

"You must not be too sanguine," said the agent, his dark melancholy face contrasting oddly with Ralph's fresh colouring, and hopeful eyes. "I have one thousand, nine hundred and ninety nine names down of members of the profession who are out of employment, or of people who seek to enter the profession. You bring up the total to two thousand."

Ralph turned a little pale. "Is it so bad as that," he said. "Then I have no chance at all it seems to me."

He asked for Macneillie's present address and went off in very low spirits to write his letter, pack up his worldly goods, and take up his quarters in the rooms which Geraghty had recommended.

People seldom do things well when they are in low spirits, and Ralph, who detested giving trouble or asking favours, wrote a stiff, short letter to Macneillie, asking his advice and inquiring whether he could possibly give him a place in his company. It was precisely the sort of letter which Macneillie received by the dozen from stage-struck youths in all parts of the country. Had he spoken of his boyish hero-worship of the actor, or of their encounter at Richmond, there would have been a human touch about the letter which would at once have appealed to the Scotsman; he would certainly have made a special effort for one so closely connected with the most tragic day of his life. But Ralph after floundering hope-

lessly in a sentence which alluded to the past, tore up his sheet of paper and wrote the bald, curt note, which so ill conveyed the real state of his case.

Macneillie, wearily returning from a rehearsal of four hours' length, in which his temper had been severely tried, found the missive in his dreary lodgings at a south-coast watering place, hastily glanced through the contents and thrust the letter into his letter-clip among other similar requests, about which there was no immediate hurry. A fortnight later he wrote the following short reply:

"DEAR SIR,

"I have no opening at present in my company, and if you really intend to go into the profession, and have realised that it demands incessant and most arduous work, I should strongly advise you to begin at the beginning of all things. Try to get taken on as a super at one of the leading theatres, where you will have opportunities for studying really great actors. Costa is a trustworthy agent.

"Yours truly,

"HUGH MACNEILLIE."

The letter chanced to arrive in Paradise Street on a foggy September evening when Ralph was in particularly low spirits. He had expected much from Macneillie and was proportionately disappointed. It seemed almost as if an old friend had shut the door in his face, nor did he quite realise that few men as busy, and as much tormented by importunate scribblers as Macneillie, would have troubled to answer his appeal at all. What was he to do? Where was he to turn for work? And how much longer would Evereld's money hold out? The question was more easily than satisfactorily answered. It was clearly impossible that he could exist much longer in

Paradise Street, and though its dingy room and bare, scanty furniture was far from inviting, yet he had grown fond of his good-natured landlord and took a kindly interest in the whole family of Doolans, with their easy, happy-go-lucky ways, and strong sense of humour. Life was lonely enough now. What would it be if he were altogether without a home in this great wilderness of London?

CHAPTER VIII

"A man who habitually pleases himself will become continually more selfish and sordid, even among the most noble and beautiful conditions which nature, history, or art can furnish; and, on the other hand, any one who will try each day to live for the sake of others, will grow more and more gracious in thought and bearing, however dull and even squalid may be the outward circumstances of his soul's probation."—DEAN PAGET.

RALPH'S chief comfort at this time was in a certain free library at no great distance from his lodgings. He made his way there now, and for a time lost the sense of his troubles in the world of books. This evening he had the good fortune to light upon Stanley Weyman's "House of the Wolf," a story which gave him keener and more healthy enjoyment than he had known for many a day. When he came back to the everyday world again and set out for his return walk to Paradise Street, he found that the fog had very much increased and it was with great difficulty that he could make out his way. As he was groping cautiously along an almost deserted street, he was startled by the sound of a shrill, childish voice.

"Let me go! Let me go!" it cried passionately. "How dare you stop me? How dare you?"

Ralph ran in the direction of the sound, until in the fog and darkness, he cannoned against the form of a man who turned angrily upon him, revealing as he did so, in the dim lamplight which struggled through the murky

air, the evil face of an old *roué*. Fighting to free herself from him, like a little wild-cat, was the figure of a mere child; her vigour and agility were wonderful to behold and it was a task of no great difficulty for Ralph to help in freeing her from the clutches of the two-legged brute. Spite of the imperfect light, the child had been quick-witted enough to recognise the new comer as a protector, and she clung firmly to his hand as they went down the foggy street, never pausing until all fear of further molestation was over. Then, panting for breath, she stopped for a minute beneath a lamp-post, and in the little oasis of light, looked searchingly up into his face as though to make quite sure what manner of man he was. He saw now that she must be older than he had thought; from her height he had fancied her about eleven but he realised both by her face and her expression, that she must be at least fifteen. Her colouring was curiously like Evereld's but the face was sharper, and had a funny look of assurance and knowledge of the world, which was, nevertheless, belied by the childish curves of cheek and chin, and by the nervous pressure with which she still clasped his hand.

"I don't know a bit what this street is," she said, with tears in her voice, "And if I don't soon get home grandfather will be dreadfully anxious about me."

"Where is your home?" asked Ralph, feeling curiously drawn to the forlorn little mortal who had crossed his path so strangely.

"It's in Paradise Street, Vauxhall," said the child.

"Ah, that's lucky!" said Ralph. "My rooms are there too. What takes you out at this time of night? It's not safe for you to be wandering about London alone."

"I always do go alone," said the child, a little indignantly. "And no one ever dared to bother me before. One of the dressers always walks with me as far as our

roads lie together, but this bit I always do alone ever since I went to the theatre."

"Oh you are on the stage," said Ralph, his interest increasing; "Well, you are lucky to have work; it's more than I can get."

"I used only to dance," said the child, eagerly. "But now I have a little part of my own, but of course you won't know my name yet, it's not much known. I am Miss Ivy Grant."

There was a comical touch of pride and dignity in the words. Ralph's lip twitched, but he bowed gravely and said he was delighted to make her acquaintance. Then, having walked a little further, they suddenly realised what road they were in and without much more difficulty groped their way home to Paradise Street.

"I want you to come in and see my grandfather," said Ivy, pausing at her door. "He will be very grateful to you for having helped me."

Ralph hesitated. "It is late for me to come in now," he said.

"It won't be late for grandfather, he never settles in till after midnight. He is half paralysed. Please come."

He couldn't find it in his heart to resist the pleading little voice, and Ivy took him through the narrow passage and into the front sitting-room, where they found a fine looking old man whose flowing, white beard and many coloured dressing-gown gave him a sort of Eastern look. The small, grey, critical eyes, however, were not Eastern at all and when he spoke Ralph fancied that he could detect a slight Scotch accent, which together with the tone of voice made him think somehow of Sir Matthew Mactavish.

He looked searchingly at the new comer, but on Ivy's hurried explanation held out his hand cordially, thanking him for coming to the child's aid with a warmth which was evidently genuine.

"She has to be breadwinner-in-chief to the establishment," he said, with a smile, "And being a wise-like little body seldom gets into difficulties. Being a useless old log myself I should long ago have been hewn down and cast into the Union had it not been for the Ivy that supported me."

"You say those pretty things because you know it will make me come and kiss you," said Ivy, saucily, as she threw off her cloak and hat and wreathed her arms about the old man's neck. "And now while I get your coffee ready you must talk to Mr. Denmead, for he wants work at the theatre and can't get it."

"Half a dozen years ago when I was dramatic critic for the *Pennon* I might have done something for you," said the old man, wistfully. "But now I am little but a burden as I told you. A few pupils come to me still for lessons in elocution, and I have the training of Ivy who is going to be a credit to me."

As he spoke he glanced towards the little housewife who with an air of importance was preparing the supper. Ralph thought he had never before seen any one move with such grace, and though her face was lacking in the simplicity and peace which characterised Evereld, it was a particularly winsome little face.

"How did you get on to-night little one?" said the old man.

"Very well," said Ivy as she poured the coffee out of an ancient percolator into three earthenware cups which had seen hard service. Ralph observed that she kept the cup without a handle for herself, and carefully selected him one which was without a chip on the drinking side of the rim. "But I might easily have broken my leg," she continued, cheerfully; "for that stupid Jem had forgotten to shut one of the traps properly, and Mr. Merrithorne stumbled and hurt his ankle badly."

"What part does he play?" said her grandfather.

"Oh he hasn't very much to do, he is a rather stupid footman and he was bringing in the luncheon tray with the property pie and that old fowl which wants painting again so badly, and when he tripped up, the pie went bowling down the stage, and the fowl landed in Miss West's lap and every one roared with laughter. She was dreadfully angry, but afterwards when it seemed that Mr. Merrithorne was really hurt she was rather sorry for him."

"Who is his understudy?"

"I don't know. It is such a little part, perhaps he hasn't one. But he was limping dreadfully as he went away. I shouldn't think he could act to-morrow."

"It's possible that might give you a chance," said the professor of elocution. "A stupid, countrified man-servant you say, Ivy? Are you pretty good at dialect?"

Ralph laughed, for he knew that he was an adept at a certain south country dialect, and without more ado stood up and gave the Professor a short and highly humourous dialogue between a ploughman and his boy, with which he had often made Evereld and her governess laugh.

"Good," said the Professor, his grey eyes twinkling, "I think you'll do young man; but come to me to-morrow morning at nine o'clock and I'll give you a few hints about voice production."

Ralph coloured. "You are very good," he said, "but to tell the truth I am at my wit's end for money and much as I would like lessons can't possibly afford them."

"Pshaw! nonsense," said the Professor, knitting his brows. "I'm already in your debt, for it might have fared ill with the child had you not taken care of her to-night. If I can give you a helping hand, nothing would please me better. And after the lesson you might go round with Ivy, and I'll give you an introduction to the manager. He's a man I knew well at one time."

Ralph's face lighted up. "I should be very grateful," he said, eagerly, "for this waiting about for work is tedious enough, and I shall be starved out before long."

He went home much cheered and with great expectations. The Professor interested him; there was something half mysterious about the white-haired old man which puzzled him and piqued his curiosity. He was particularly benevolent and kindly and yet he seemed as unpractical as a mere visionary, and was surely to blame in letting a child like Ivy go to and from the theatre each night alone.

Clearly the granddaughter was manager-in-chief as well as breadwinner, and as he thought of her winsome little face with its shrewd, light-blue eyes, slightly *retroussé* nose, and small, firm mouth he felt a keen desire to see more of her. She was so quaint in her brisk, housewifely arrangements, so deft and clever in all her ways; a little conscious at times, and quite capable of posing for effect, but lovable in spite of that.

"I could soon laugh her out of those little affectations," he thought to himself. "And there is such a look of Evereld about her that she must at heart be good. She is very clever, possibly she is even cunning, and she has extraordinary tact—almost too much for such a child."

He went to sleep and was haunted all night by that funny, pathetic, little face of the child actress. Together they fled from a thousand perils, and when next morning he saw her again face to face, it seemed to him that they were quite old companions.

"Good day," said the Professor in his bland, pleasant voice as Ralph was ushered into the dreary little room. "Sit down for a minute, I have not yet finished with my other pupil. Now sir! don't mumble like a bee in a bottle. You know well enough how to get the clear shock of the glottis and that's the secret of voice produc-

tion. You have the voice and the lungs and the knowledge of the method, but you are lazy, incorrigibly lazy!"

The young man crimsoned and with an effort burst out with one of Prospero's speeches:

> "I pray thee, mark me.
> I, thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated
> To closeness and the bettering of my mind
> With that which, but by being so retired,
> O'er prized all popular rate, in my false brother
> Awaked an evil nature."

There he was arrested; for the Professor thundered on the floor with his walking stick, looking as if he would much have enjoyed laying it about the victim's shoulders.

His scathing sarcasms, his merciless interruptions, his sharp criticism, would have tried the patience of Job himself, but his unfortunate pupil struggled on and really improved marvellously, while Ralph sat an observant spectator, learning not a little from all that went on. At the close of the instruction the old man's serenity of manner returned—he even praised the youth he had so violently abused but a minute before. The reason of this soon transpired; he needed his help with the next pupil. "You are not pressed for time?" he asked, with a smile. "Then I shall be much obliged if you will kindly help my new pupil, Mr. Denmead, with the first exercise."

The victim glanced somewhat anxiously at the clock, but the Professor was evidently an autocrat, and it would have been easier to refuse a request made by the Czar himself.

"You will lie at full length on the floor," said the Professor, with a lordly wave of the hand towards Ralph. "My pupil, Mr. Bourne, will then kneel on your chest,

and you will in this position practise the art of breathing."

Ralph obeyed, not without a strong sense of the absurdity of the whole scene. Could Sir Matthew Mactavish have seen him at that moment, lying on the bare boards of a dingy lodging-house in Vauxhall, with a young reciter of no mean weight kneeling on his chest, with a paralytic and mysterious old sage roaring and shouting instructions and beating impatient tattoos with his stick at intervals, while a pretty young girl sat by the window covering stage shoes with cheap pink satin, how amazed he would have been.

This was certainly beginning at the beginning of all things. By eleven o'clock that morning he was for the first time in his life entering the stage door of a theatre, —it was one of the outlying suburban houses at which there was a stock company and a frequent change of plays,—while Ivy, with her funny little air of importance, showed him all that she thought would interest him.

The manager, a somewhat harassed looking man, took the Professor's note, read it hurriedly, and glanced keenly at Ralph.

"Does Mr. Merrithorne act to-night?" asked Ivy, anxiously.

"No, my dear; he won't be fit to go on again for a month at least. I understand, Mr. Denmead, that you are a pupil of Professor Grant."

"Yes," said Ralph, "but I am quite a novice."

"H'm," said the manager, taking a long look at him. "You're positively the first man that ever made that confession to me. I've a mind to try you. Come with me, and I will give you the part. You can read it at rehearsal if you haven't time to learn it."

Ivy beamed with delight when he returned to her.

"The manager was just in his very best temper," she

said, happily. "Come to this quiet corner, and I'll see that no one interrupts you."

The part was short and simple, and Ralph, who had an excellent memory, learnt it easily enough. But when it came to rehearsing his scenes in the dreary vastness of the empty theatre amid distant sounds of hammering and scrubbing, and the perfectly audible comments of his fellow actors, he felt in despair; there was no getting inside the character, he could only feel himself Ralph Denmead, in uncomfortable circumstances, and breathing a curious atmosphere of hostility. He went home feeling nervous and miserable, but Ivy's talk helped to amuse him, and distract his attention.

"They will like you when they get used to you," she said, philosophically. "But some of them think you are just a wealthy amateur, and that you have paid for the chance of appearing in public. We all hate that kind of man. Some others say you are an Oxonian wanting a little amusement during the long vacation, and that you will be going back to the University next month. And Miss West thinks you are a disguised nobleman."

"Well, then, they're all of them wrong," said Ralph, obliged to laugh in spite of himself. "I'm not a disguised duke, nor even a marquis, but just plain Ralph Denmead, with very few coins in his pocket, and not a single relation or rich friend to help him."

When the evening came, Ralph found that the flatness and coldness of the morning had entirely passed; every one seemed in better spirits, and the two men who shared his dressing-room were friendly enough directly they found he was a genuine worker, not a mere *dilettante*.

A youngster who was neither conceited nor grasping, but was content to begin with a very small part, and a still smaller salary, was quite a phenomenon, and, as usual, Ralph's good humour and common-sense, together

with his readiness to see fun in everything, stood him in good stead.

When the last awful moment arrived, and he stood at the wings in his gorgeous livery of drab and scarlet, with powdered hair and knee-breeches, he found that the atmosphere of hostility which he had felt so oppressive at rehearsal was entirely gone.

"Good luck to you!" said the heavy man, laying a fatherly hand on his shoulder. "Never fear; you'll do well enough."

And with these words to hearten him, he took that first desperate plunge into the icy-cold waters of publicity.

Ivy's face beamed upon him as he returned.

"That applause was for you," she said, rapturously, "and they don't generally laugh nearly as much after that blunder with the luncheon table."

"But I see where I might improve it," said Ralph, thoughtfully. And truly enough he did improve each night he played the servant and other small parts.

Then, at the end of a month, Merrithorne's ankle recovered, he returned to the theatre, and Ralph once more found himself out of work.

What was his next step to be?

CHAPTER IX

"If I were loved, as I desire to be,
What is there in the great sphere of the earth,
And range of evil between death and birth,
That I shall fear, if I were loved by thee?"

TENNYSON.

"If yer plase, yer honour, Mr. Geraghty is below, and would like to see yer honour if its convaniant," said little Nora Doolan, thrusting her untidy head into the cheerless back room in Paradise Street.

Ralph, who was pacing to and fro learning a part in a Shakesperian play which he was little likely to act as yet, glanced round with brightening face.

"What? Dear old Geraghty!" he exclaimed. "I'm glad he has looked me up. Show him upstairs Nora, for I should like to have a talk with him."

The old man-servant responded with alacrity to the warm welcome he received.

"It's delighted I am to see you again, Mr. Ralph," he exclaimed, looking him over with an air of satisfaction as though he had some share in his well-being. "And it's in good health that you are looking, sir, and no mistake."

"Nothing like hard work, Geraghty, for keeping a man well," said Ralph. "And I hope I'm settled now for some time to come. You can tell Miss Evereld that I'm at the very theatre we so often used to go to, and that I have the pleasure of seeing Washington act every night."

"I'm glad to hear it, sir," said Geraghty. "We all knew long ago, sir, that you'd make a first-class actor; it took but a little small bit of discrimination to see that much."

Ralph laughed. "Well, Geraghty, you mustn't run away with the notion that I'm a star, for, as a matter of fact, I am nothing but a super at a pound a week. But it's better to begin at the beginning in a good theatre than to be cock-of-the-walk in a fifth-rate one."

"To be sure, sir, it's just what I was saying but now to my sister about placing her eldest girl. 'Never mind how little she earns the first year or two,' said I, 'but for heaven's sake place her in a gentleman's family, and don't let her demean herself by takin' service with them that hasn't an ounce of breeding to bless themselves with. Let her be kitchen or scullery-maid or what you will, but have her with gentry.'"

"Geraghty," said Ralph, with a mischievous smile, "You have such a respect for birth that it's my firm conviction you'll be the last and most staunch supporter left to the House of Lords."

Geraghty laughed all over his face, and his broad shoulders shook.

"I've seen just a little too much of the aristocracy to pin my faith to them, sir. Handsome is as handsome does, and gentle is as gentle does. But from the House of Lords and their marrin' and muddlin'—Good Lord deliver us!"

Ralph who had purposely provoked this tirade from the Irishman, laughed and changed the subject by an inquiry after Evereld.

"Well, thank God, she's getting on finely, sir. Seems as if there was a special Providence over orphans, and Bridget she says why that's natural enough, that their parents can see better how to guide them bein' higher up so to speak. But, however that may be, at first we

all thought she'd fret her heart out with missin' you, sir. But in September, Bridget took her down to the school at Southbourne, and though she was a bit faint-hearted at the notion, she'd no sooner set eyes on the place than she was sure she'd be happy there. Bridget says it's the most beautiful house and garden you ever saw, and all so comfortable and homelike in spite of the size. And Miss Evereld writes that she's as happy as the day is long, and that they're teaching her how to nurse sick folks, and that she's learnt to darn her own stockin's—a thing she never got a chance o' doin' at home—and to dance the minuet, and to do algebra, and I don't know what beside. But, from what Bridget told me, I foregathered that it wasn't a school where they cram them like turkeys for Christmas or geese for a Michaelmas fair, but just a home on a large scale for turnin' out well-mannered young gentlewomen who'll have a very good notion how to manage a home on a smaller scale."

When the old Butler had gone, Ralph fell into a reverie. The effect of hearing all about Evereld had been to make him long very impatiently for the end of their separation. It was true that when she returned to the Mactavishes at Christmas he could write to her without any breach of regulations, but there seemed no chance of their meeting, and he greatly missed his old companion. He began to weave all manner of visions of future success, and to imagine that in an incredibly short space of time he had gained quite a high position at Washington's theatre, that he met Evereld in society, and that Sir Matthew, who always paid homage to the successful, became quite friendly and cordial to him. How strange it would be to be invited as a distinguished guest to the very house in Queen Anne's Gate where he had been snubbed and scolded as a boy.

It was with something of a shock that he came back to the prosaic present and found himself merely a super

about to go through, for the fiftieth time, the wearisome business which was his allotted share in a play which was likely to run for many months more.

It was just at Christmas that he was confronted by one of those decisions that form the chief difficulty of an actor's career. To seize the right opportunity of promotion, yet to avoid "Raw haste, half-sister to delay"; to have precisely that right judgment which often determines the success or failure of a life, is hard to all mortals, but hardest to those of the artistic temperament. The temptation to escape from the monotony of his present work came to him through the Professor's granddaughter.

To little Ivy Grant he had from the very first seemed a full fledged hero. He was the first man she had ever looked up to, for although devoted to her old grandfather it was not easy to respect the Professor. He seemed, to shrewd little Ivy, a very weak old man, and she despised the weak, not understanding at all that habit of making large allowance for human infirmity which grows with the growing years. The old man was a confirmed opium eater. The habit, begun in a time of physical pain and great mental worry, had now bound him fast in its cruel chains, and the kindly benevolence which had struck Ralph at first sight as so strange a contrast with his blameworthy neglect of Ivy's safety, was all due to the influence of the drug. His will was now not in the least his own, and though he had his moments of exquisite exaltation he had always to pay for them by times of black depression and misery. Under these circumstances the child's life could hardly be a happy one; she was, moreover, scarcely strong enough for the late hours and the exposure to all sorts of weather which her work entailed, and in spite of her brisk, managing ways she began to crave for something more strong and trustworthy to support her than her grandfather whose

simile of the lifeless trunk of the tree kept up by the ivy supporting it, had been singularly near the truth.

When Ralph no longer played at the same theatre, and their meetings became less frequent, the little girl flagged and lost heart. She had good impulses but she was easily led, and her friendship with Ralph had filled her with a sense of dissatisfaction with her own life, and the lives that most nearly touched her own. Her busy little brain began to form eager plans for the future, and at last fate put in her way a chance which revived her drooping spirits, and lighted up her blue eyes with hope. Her good news arrived on Christmas day, otherwise the festival would have been cheerless enough, for the old Professor had slept in his invalid chair the whole of the morning, and Ivy, sitting in solitary state beside the fire, had eaten a sober little Christmas dinner consisting of a slice of cold meat and a mince-pie kindly given to her by the landlady. Then having tidied the bare little room, and stuck a solitary piece of holly in the window that people might see she was "keeping Christmas" properly, she returned to her place on the hearth-rug, and tried to become interested in a penny novelette which should have been exciting, but somehow failed to touch her.

"Stupid thing!" she exclaimed presently, throwing the book to the further end of the room with a little petulant gesture. "I can't even cry when the heroine dies. What is the good of a book if you can't cry over it?"

Just then there came a tap at the door, and in walked Ralph with his cheerful face, and in his hands was a great bunch of ivy and mistletoe.

"A happy Christmas to you," he said, taking her cold little hand in his. "How's the Professor? Not worse I hope?"

"He is no worse," said Ivy, "but he has been asleep

all day, and it's dreadfully dull. Where did you get such lovely evergreens?"

"Walked out into the country this morning, right away beyond Hampstead. As for the mistletoe, that's a particular present from Dan Doolan, and I've just had to kiss seven small Doolans beneath it before they would let me out of the house. Now your turn has come."

Ivy laughed and protested, but was thrilled through and through by the kiss, though it was just as matter-of-fact as that which he had bestowed on Tim Doolan, aged three. Her little, pale face lighted up radiantly, but unobservant Ralph saw nothing of that, he was bestowing all his energies on the decoration of the dreary, little room, and crowning with ivy the portraits of sundry great actors and actresses.

"Do you think Mrs. Siddons ever looked as stiff and forbidding as this?" he said, glancing round with a smile, as Ivy held him a laurel branch to put above the frame.

"Yes," she replied, saucily. "She must have looked like that when she said in awful tones, 'Will it wash?' to the poor frightened shopman who was serving her."

"Ah, perhaps. Well, Ivy, there is no fear that you will ever strike terror into any one's heart."

"Who cares for striking terror into people?" she replied, merrily, and as she spoke she began to float dreamily away into an exquisitely graceful skirt-dance; her little, childish face growing more and more sweet and tranquil as she proceeded.

Clearly dancing was her vocation. Ralph stood with his back to the fire watching her perfect grace: it seemed to him the very poetry of motion. And Ivy was at her very best when she was dancing; at other times her ways occasionally jarred on him, her acting left much to be desired, and a certain vein of silliness in her now and then awoke his contempt, but when dancing she seemed like one inspired; he could only wonder and admire.

"Some day you will be our greatest English dancer," he said, as once more she settled down into her nook beside the fire.

"I don't want to be that," said Ivy, "English dancers are never made so much of as foreigners, and besides, a dancer's position is not so good. I mean to be an actress."

"It's a thousand pities," said Ralph. "Why do people always want to do things they can't do well."

Ivy pouted.

"Grandfather doesn't wish me only to dance," she said. "And besides I have just heard of quite a fresh opening. What would you say to earning two pounds a week?"

"I should say I'm not likely to do that yet awhile," said Ralph, philosophically.

"But you can! you can!" said Ivy, clapping her hands joyfully. "There's an opening for you as well as for me, for I specially asked. It's a 'fit up' company and we should be wanted in February when the pantomime is over."

"Where?" asked Ralph, looking incredulous.

"For a tour in Scotland. A 'fit up' company too, and nothing to provide but just wigs and shoes and tights."

"Who is the manager?"

"The husband of the leading lady. His name is Skoot."

"Don't like the name," said Ralph, laughing.

"Why what's in a name?" said Ivy. "The poor man didn't choose it. For my part I think it is better than assuming some grand name that doesn't belong to him. And then his Christian name is Theophilus."

But Ralph still laughed.

"Worse and worse," he said. "Theophilus Skoot is a detestable combination. Dick, Tom, or Harry, would

have been better. No, no, Ivy; I think we had better stay where we are."

Ivy looked much disheartened, and to change the subject Ralph suggested that they should go together to the Abbey. This pleased her, she forgot the Scotch tour and only revelled in the bliss of the present. To walk to church on Christmas day with her ideal man, to feel the subtle influence of the beautiful Abbey, the lights, the music, the religious atmosphere, seemed to her a sort of foretaste of heaven, a slightly sensuous heaven perhaps, but the highest she was as yet capable of imagining. Ralph was not sorry to have the child with him, for his Christmas had been lonely enough. But his thoughts wandered far away from her during the service. He was back again at Whinhaven listening to his father's voice, or he was with Evereld and her governess listening to solemn old chorales at Dresden.

Presently a very slight thing recalled him to his actual surroundings. The sermon was about to begin and some one sitting in front of him rose to go just as the text was given out:

"And in the fulness of time God sent——"

He heard no more for the vacant place had revealed to him, at a little distance in front, a profile which arrested his whole attention. Something in its earnest, absorbed expression, in its exquisite purity, in the listening look of one who is eager to learn, appealed to him strongly. Then suddenly his heart gave a bound, for it was borne in upon him that he was looking at Evereld. Not the Evereld he had left on that summer day as a playmate and comrade, but a new Evereld who had developed into a woman—the one woman in all the world for him. He did not wish the sermon ended, he could have been almost content to sit on there for ever just watching her; that curious description of heaven as a place

> "Where congregations ne'er break up,
> And Sabbaths never end,"—

a notion which has cast a gloom over so many children's hearts, seemed to him in his present mood after all not so impossible.

When the service was really over, and the people began to disperse, he was in a fever lest he should be unable to reach her, and it was not until he had discovered that Bridget was her companion that he could feel at all secure of any real talk with her.

Ivy, quite unconscious of all this, wondered a little when he paused in the nave; but she did not at all object to standing there with him, looking into the dim beauty of the stately building, and with a proud little consciousness that many people glanced at them as they passed by. It was so nice, she reflected, to go to church with a man like Ralph, a man wholly unlike any other she had yet come across in her short and rather dreary life.

Meanwhile, Evereld was drawing nearer. Ivy was just admiring her dark-green jacket and toque with their beaver trimmings, and longing to have just such a costume herself, when she saw a vivid colour suffuse the wearer's face, her blue eyes shone radiantly, her lips smiled such a welcoming smile at Ralph that no words, no hand-clasp, seemed necessary. Side by side they passed together out of the Abbey, while Ivy, in blank surprise, followed in their wake.

"To think that you were there all the time and that I never knew it," said Evereld, when the greetings were over. "Where is Bridget? How surprised she will be. Look, Bridget, here is Mr. Ralph come back."

"An' it's glad I am to see you, sir. There'll be no need, I'm thinkin', to wish you a happy Christmas, for I can see by your face that you've got it."

Ralph did, indeed, seem to be in the seventh heaven of happiness, but as he gave a cordial greeting to the old servant he happened to notice Ivy's wistful, little face, and, with a pang of reproach for having altogether for-

gotten her, he took her hand in his and introduced her to Evereld.

"This is a little friend of mine," he said. "The granddaughter of Professor Grant, my elocution master."

Evereld liked the look of the little fairylike figure, but she seemed to her the merest child, and after a few kindly words she thought no more of her, being naturally absorbed in Ralph and having so much to say to him after their long separation.

Ivy, with a sigh, dropped behind with Bridget, who, in her motherly fashion, took her under her special protection as they crossed the wide road near the Aquarium, little guessing that this small person was well used to going about London quite alone at all hours.

"And how are things going at Queen Anne's Gate?" asked Ralph, when Evereld had told him all about her life at Southbourne.

"It's so dull I hardly know how to bear it," said Evereld. "You see, I'm too big now for children's parties, and, of course, I'm not out yet. I miss you all day long, and no one so much as speaks of you, except now and then Mr. Bruce Wylie, and he always did like you."

"Not he," said Ralph. "He made believe, though, for the sake of pleasing you."

"I see that you have not lost your way of thinking evil of people," said Evereld, reproachfully. "Mr. Wylie is the kindest man I know."

"But you don't know him," said Ralph. "You merely see him now and then and like his pleasant way of talking, and find him a relief from the Mactavish clan."

"And how much do you know him?" said Evereld, teasingly.

"Not much, certainly," he was constrained to own with a smile, "and it may be jealousy that makes me decry him. Yet, if instinct goes for anything, he is a man I should never trust."

"What! such a frank, straightforward sort of man as that?" she exclaimed, in dismay.

"I know he's very plausible, I know he has many good points even, but I fancy he could persuade himself that anything was right if only it promoted his own ends."

"At any rate, he is the one person who ever troubles to inquire after you, and I believe that is the chief reason I have for liking him."

Ralph was so well content with this speech that he let the subject drop, and, as Evereld was eager to hear all that he had been doing since they had been separated, he began to give her an amusing account of the straits he had been in and the work he had obtained. Far too soon they reached Sir Matthew's house, and were obliged to part.

"You will write when you can?" said Evereld, wistfully, as she lingered for a moment on the steps with her hand in his. "I don't think Sir Matthew has any right to object, and I shall want to know what you decide about Scotland."

"Yes, you shall hear directly it is decided," said Ralph, trying to feel hopeful. "I wish I knew what would be the wisest thing to do."

Then, with a lingering glance into the sweet eyes lifted to his, he bade her good-bye and turned away.

"How I wish I were the Professor's little granddaughter," she thought to herself as she glanced down the dark road after them, with a sick longing to be going too. And, had she but known it, Ivy was at that very time thinking enviously of Ralph's old friend and of her many advantages.

Meanwhile Geraghty threw open the front door, and in the cheerful light that streamed through the hall Evereld caught a vision of Sir Matthew coming down the stairs, and, taking her courage in both hands, she entered the house and went straight up to him.

CHAPTER X

"Savage at heart, and false of tongue,
Subtle with age, and smooth to the young,
Like a snake in his coiling and curling."

T. Hood.

"So you have been to the Abbey?" he said, smiling benevolently upon her.

"Yes," she replied, her blue eyes looking straight into his. "And we have seen Ralph. He was there, too, just behind us. He walked back with us."

Sir Matthew frowned slightly. Then, recollecting the presence of the servants, he beckoned Evereld to his study.

"Come in here, my dear," he said, in his soft voice. "You are quite right to tell me all so frankly, and it is natural enough that you should be pleased to meet your old playfellow. But you must remember that things are not now as they once were."

"Ralph and I shall always be friends," said Evereld, gently, but with a firmness which startled her guardian. "Things are not altered between us because we don't live under the same roof now. How could that alter us?"

"My dear, it is for Lady Mactavish and myself to decide who shall or who shall not be your friends," he said, with quiet decision.

"That may be," said Evereld, "as far as new friends are concerned, but I cannot unmake a friend to order—no, not even if the Queen commanded it."

They both smiled a little. Sir Matthew paced the room in silence.

"I must not forbid her to hold any communication with him," he reflected, "or let her feel that I am a tyrant and they a couple of martyrs. After all, she is so young and simple and innocent; no mischief will come of it."

"Has Ralph found work?" he inquired, not unkindly.

"Yes," she said, "at Washington's theatre; and perhaps he is going on a Scotch tour."

"Good!" said Sir Matthew, approvingly. "After all, he has talent, and will make himself a name in time. His best chance would be to marry some experienced actress older than himself. That has answered very well in one or two cases. His birth and education would go for something, and if he plays his cards well the stage may make his fortune. By-the-by, Bruce Wylie is to dine with us to-night. You like him, do you not?"

"Oh, yes," said Evereld, "I like him very much."

And Sir Matthew, satisfied with the warmth of her tone, dismissed her with a paternal kiss, and an injunction to put on her prettiest gown in honour of the festival.

Bruce Wylie was certainly the most attractive and amusing of the men who visited the Mactavishes. He had the easy, comfortable air of an old friend, and he came and went at all hours, yet never seemed to be present when he was not wanted. His fair hair and short, fair beard contrasted rather curiously with his dark, keen eyes. He had a brisk, kindly, pleasant manner, and a particularly winning voice. There was about him, too, a saving sense of humour, and the rather heavy atmosphere of Sir Matthew's household always seemed less oppressive when he was present. He was a first-rate *raconteur*, and Evereld was never tired of listening to his stories.

It was all in vain that she tried to see him with Ralph's eyes. She decided in her own mind that his hard experience of the world had made Ralph somewhat cynical and distrustful. He had convinced her with regard to Sir Matthew, but to belief in Bruce Wylie she still clung with all the loyalty of her fresh, innocent youth.

And yet the ladies had only left the dining-room a few moments when Bruce Wylie revealed a very different side of himself.

"Ewart's little girl is looking prettier than usual to-night," he remarked, as he picked out the preserved apricots from a small dish in front of him, leaving only bitter oranges and citrons for those who might come after.

"Yes," said Sir Matthew, "Southbourne has done wonders for her. She had better have another six months there."

"Was she not eighteen in the autumn? She will want to come out next season."

"I don't think it," said Sir Matthew. "She is happy enough there, and we shall do well to keep her from the heiress-hunters till she is safely betrothed to you."

"Poor little soul!" said Bruce Wylie, reflectively. "There would be no danger in letting her see a little of the world first."

"We won't risk that," said his companion. "What's to prevent her falling in love with some young fellow and refusing to look at you. If she ever lost her heart, she would be the veriest little shrew to manage—there would be no taming her. We might prevent her marrying till she was of age, but you know what revelations would come about when her affairs were looked into. No, no; she must be safely married to her worthy solicitor, Bruce Wylie, as soon as possible after she leaves school."

Bruce Wylie seemed lost in thought. Sir Matthew watched him, half-suspiciously. They were friends and

26025A

confederates, but the company promoter trusted no one in the world implicitly.

"You are thinking that it is a risky venture," he said, quietly, "but under the circumstances it's far the best thing that can be done. If the South African affair goes on as well as it promises, her money will be safe enough in the long run; and if a smash comes, why her money will be gone, but our names and reputations will be safe, and no great harm will come of it."

"I was not thinking of that," said Bruce Wylie. "There's another side to the business, and one can't altogether overlook it. I am fond of the little thing, and I honestly believe she likes me, but if anything of this should ever leak out, if, after we were married, her suspicions were roused, why then, as you say, I can imagine that the taming process might be difficult. Spite of her china-blue eyes, there's a pretty spice of determination in Ewart's little girl."

"My dear fellow, you astonish me," said Sir Matthew, impatiently. "With enough on your mind to burden most men heavily, you can yet find time to worry over the matrimonial squabbles that may ruffle your future peace. When once she's your wife you'll be able to do what you please with her."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Bruce Wylie. "It's just those little, gentle women with hardly a word to say for themselves who are always astonishing people by hidden stores of force and courage and daring at some critical moment."

"The only possible difficulty with Evereld would be her friendship for Ralph Denmead," said Sir Matthew, "and, as ill luck will have it, the fellow turned up again to-day."

"D—— him!" exclaimed Bruce Wylie. "How was that?"

"Saw her at the Abbey, and had the audacity to walk

home with her. She told me all about it with the utmost frankness, and without so much as a change of colour. I don't think there is any mischief done yet, but the less she sees of him the better. It seems that he is doing pretty well on the stage ; at least, I gathered so."

"Well," said Bruce Wylie, reflectively, "it is always easy to set a scandal afloat about an actor, and if she seems losing her heart to him that is the line we must take."

And therewith the two friends fell to talking of other business arrangements.

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When Ralph turned away from the house in Queen Anne's Gate, the happy excitement of the past hour suddenly gave place to a sobering realisation of things as they were. He, Ralph Denmead, a super at a pound a week, had had the audacity to fall in love with a girl of whose fortune he had, indeed, very vague ideas, but who had always been considered an heiress. That was a situation he liked very little, but it was characteristic of him that he did not sink into any very great depths of depression. He was not easily depressed, having been born with one of those equable tempers which are as delightful as they are rare. Then, too, his very indifference to money for its own sake, the habit he had inherited from his unworldly father of a positive dislike of all display and a contempt for all but the simplest tastes, came now to his aid. Extremes meet. And the marriage, which would have seemed a perfectly simple and desirable arrangement to a selfish fortune-hunter, seemed also perfectly possible to Ralph with his unconventional way of looking at things. He disliked her fortune, would gladly have foregone it altogether, but saw no reason in the world why it should stand as a barrier between them. If she loved him all would be well. He hoped she did

love him, but was not certain. Only in that last quiet good-bye of hers something in its very self-control had given him hope ; for the first time she seemed to shrink a little from showing how much she felt the parting. She was wholly unlike the little girl he had left sobbing in the schoolroom at Sir Matthew's country cottage a few months before.

As he thought of this, a sort of wild desire to succeed in his profession, and to succeed quickly, took possession of him. His present position at the foot of the ladder seemed no longer tolerable. Patient plodding had been well enough earlier in the day, but now the fiery impatience of youth began to get the better of him. He turned eagerly to Ivy. They had by this time reached Westminster Bridge, and the cold, fresh wind from the river and the wider view seemed in harmony with his eager longing for a fuller, freer life, for an escape from the dull routine of his present work.

"Tell me more about this Scotch tour" he said, eagerly. "Do you think there is really a chance of our getting into the company? Does your grandfather think Skoot a decent sort of fellow?"

"Oh yes," said Ivy, her face lighting up radiantly. "Come and talk to him about it. He has seen both the manager and his wife : he used to know them long ago. Oh, do think it over again. Just fancy how beautiful it would be to see Scotland ! We would go to Ellen's Isle together and see the Trossachs!"

Ralph laughed. "I fear there are no theatres on the shores of Loch Katrine," he said.

"Well," said Ivy, looking disappointed, "we should at any rate see mountains, and the travelling would be such fun. I have never been on tour in my life, hardly ever out of London even. Come in and see grandfather and talk about it."

Ralph was persuaded to follow her into the dreary,

little house, and much to Ivy's satisfaction her grandfather was awake and seemed in excellent spirits. He was inclined to see everything in the world through rose-coloured spectacles, and was about as fit to advise any one as a baby of three years old. But his venerable aspect and his smiling benevolent face were, nevertheless, impressive and Ralph listened eagerly to all that he said. It was quite true that he had known this manager and his wife many years ago: they were most estimable people. Skoot himself had real talent, his wife not much more than a pretty face, but they were thoroughly worthy people; she was a woman with whom he could trust Ivy, he had never heard a word against her. He should miss Ivy, but the landlady would take care of him and the experience and even the change of air would be very good for the child. He strongly advised Ralph to try and get into the Company, it was a chance which did not occur every day. He would give him a letter of introduction and he could see the manager to-morrow.

At any other time Ralph would have perceived that the old man's advice while he was under the influence of the opium was worth nothing at all. But now the bland, comfortable voice and hopeful auguries weighed with him. He accepted the offer of the introduction, and the Professor, urged by Ivy, who brought him ink and paper and put the pen between his limp, lazy fingers, actually wrote the letter. After that Ralph bade them good-bye, went home to dress for the evening, and then set out for the Marriotts' house where he had been kindly invited to dine; while Ivy went to the dress rehearsal of the pantomime. In the evening he talked over his prospects with Miss Marriott and her niece, giving a very roseate description of the Scotch proposal. The ladies both advised him to close with so good an offer; Mr. Marriott would not commit himself, only counselling him to be sure to have his agreement drawn up in a legal way,

and suggesting that he might take the advice of Washington. But this, as Ralph knew, would not be so easy; for Washington was a busy man and though greatly beloved by all his employés had little to do with them personally. Moreover in his heart of hearts Ralph knew that the great actor would counsel him to plod on patiently, and every moment he felt that this had become less possible to him.

The end of it was that he seized the very first opportunity of seeing Theophilus Skoot, and finding him a very decent-looking man, exceedingly hopeful as to the business they would do in Scotland, and quite willing to come to terms, he signed the agreement for a six months' provincial tour for which he was to receive a salary of two pounds a week, and went back to Paradise Street in excellent spirits to receive Ivy's congratulations.

CHAPTER XI

"We ought all to count the cost before we enter upon any line of conduct, and I would most strongly warn any one against the self-deception of fancying that he who wishes to be an ambassador of peace can do otherwise than weep bitterly."—FREDERICK DENISON MAURICE.

DURING the weeks that followed, the only thing which marred Ivy's complete happiness was a certain jealousy of the bright-faced girl they had met at Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day. She was constantly asking Ralph questions about Evereld Ewart; at times he seemed pleased to talk of her, at other times his face would grow grave and he would answer only in monosyllables in a way which perplexed his small devotee not a little. However, she gathered that he did not see any more of his old friend and consoled herself by hurrying off to Whiteley's sale to buy a jacket and hat as much like Evereld's as her purse would afford.

She wore them for the first time on the foggy February morning when Ralph called for her at her grandfather's rooms to take her to King's Cross. For it had been arranged that she should travel with him to Dumfries where he was to place her under the special care of the manager's wife. The old Professor seemed much depressed when the parting actually came; he kept looking at the child with wistful eyes and slowly counting out money for the journey with a small, a very small surplus, in case of accidents as he said.

"Have you kept enough for yourself?" asked Ivy,

throwing her arms round his neck. "I shall be away six months you know."

"I have enough to last me a couple of months," said the old man, "with what my pupils will bring in. And by that time you will be able to send me a little. You are to have a good salary—a very good salary and no travelling expenses when once you're in Scotland."

"Yes, yes," said Ivy, gaily. "I shall be as rich as a queen when I come back."

The old man's eyes filled with tears.

"Yes, when you come back," he said, huskily, "When you come back. You will do what you can for her if she needs help?" he added, shaking hands tremulously with Ralph.

"I will, indeed," said Ralph, heartily; and there was something in his look and tone which satisfied the Professor and robbed the parting of its worst pain.

Ivy, too much excited to feel the leave-taking, sprang into the cab with a joyous sense that at last, like the heroine of a fairy tale, she was setting out into the world to seek her fortune. It was scarcely right that she should be starting with the fairy prince beside her, he ought to have turned up later in the plot and just at some critical moment. Still real life could not always be regulated by the rules of fiction and she reflected that it was much nicer to have him at once.

She leant back in her corner of the third-class carriage, and thought what care he had taken of her, how much more gentle his manner was than the manner of any one else she knew, and how blissful it would be to act with him for six whole months. He did not talk to her very much, being still busy with his parts, but she was quite content with the mere pleasure of his presence and with the delightful novelty of her first long journey. The Company were to play "Macbeth," "East Lynne," "Guy Mannering," "Rob Roy," "The Man of the

World," "Jeannie Deans," and several short plays such as "Cramond Brig," a great favourite in Scotland. Ivy was not well pleased with her parts in "Macbeth," being cast for *Donal Bain, Fleance* and Macduff's boy. But she reflected that in the first part she would always come on with Ralph since he was to play *Malcolm,* as well as the part of second witch, while later on she should have the pleasure of being killed by him in his character of first murderer. Ralph seeing irrepressible mirth in her face asked what was amusing her.

"I have to call you 'a shag-haired villain,'" she said, laughing till the tears ran down her face, "and you have to stab me in the fourth act."

"We will have a private rehearsal then, beforehand," said Ralph, smiling. "And you will find my red wig very awe-inspiring, I can tell you."

Ivy looked pityingly at her fellow-travellers, wondering how they endured their humdrum lives, and full of radiant hopes for her own future.

The fogs of London had soon given place to bright sunshine, and it seemed to her that she had left behind all that was cheerless and was going forth into a glorious world of possibilities. It was certainly a red-letter day in her life's calendar.

The arrival in Scotland, however, was not so cheerful. The cold which they had not greatly noticed in the railway carriage, seemed bitter indeed when they left the train at Dumfries.

It was nearly six o'clock and there was little light left. What there was, revealed snowy roads and slippery pavements. Ivy shivered and clung fast hold of Ralph's hand as they made their way to the manager's rooms, a red-headed porter, much resembling the shag-haired murderer in "Macbeth," going on before them with a luggage truck. He paused at a high house in a particularly dingy street. The door was opened by a shrewd,

hard-featured woman who, upon Ralph's inquiry, told them that Mrs. Skoot was in, and ushered them upstairs to a room where the remains of dinner still lingered on the table, and a large, portly lady, with blonde hair and big cow-like eyes, sat with her feet in the fender reading a novel.

"So there you are, dear," she said, greeting Ivy affectionately, but retaining a greasy thumb in the book to keep her place. "I'm glad you've come, for Mr. Skoot has just arranged to have an extra rehearsal to-night."

"Is this Mr. Denmead?" she inquired, extending her hand graciously and taking a rapid survey of him from head to foot. "Have you found rooms yet?"

"No, I have not," said Ralph, his low-toned voice and quiet manner contrasting most curiously with her loud accents. "I was going to ask you if there is any list of lodgings."

"To be sure," she said. "Here it is; you'll find those all very good and reasonable. I've known most of them myself in past years."

Ralph thanked her and turned to go, glancing with some compassion at Ivy. "I shall see you again at rehearsal," he said. "Mind you have something to eat first."

"Oh, yes, I'll see to her," said Mrs. Skoot, vociferously. "She's to board with me you know, her grandfather made me promise that. Half-past seven for the rehearsal, don't forget. Your landlady will be able to direct you to the theatre."

"What an awful woman!" thought Ralph to himself. "The Professor must be out of his mind to let Ivy be with her for six whole months. She may be all that's virtuous—but as a constant companion! Poor Ivy! I wonder how such a decent little fellow as Skoot comes to have such a wife!"

At this point in his reflections they reached the first

house on his list, but found the rooms already secured by other members of the company. The same result followed the next application, and yet again the next. He began to grow tired of wandering about the snowy streets, and catching sight of a card in a window announcing that rooms were to be had, he paused at a neat but unpretentious house and once more made his inquiry.

A very prim-looking widow appeared in answer to his knock; she seemed favourably impressed with his appearance and mentioned her terms.

"That will do very well. I want the rooms for a week," said Ralph, longing to get into a house, for he was half-frozen and very hungry.

"I don't take lodgers that keep late hours," said the widow, cautiously. "I like to lock up by half-past ten, sir."

Ralph made an ejaculation of dismay. "I'm afraid I can't promise that," he said. "I'm an actor, you see, and am not likely to be in by that time."

The woman's whole face stiffened, her very cap seemed to grow as rigid as buckram, her upper lip lengthened. "We only take *Christians* here," she said in a severe way, and then without another word she closed the door.

It was the first time he had ever been made to feel himself an outcast on account of his profession, and for a minute the words, by their injustice, stung him. Then his sense of fun conquered and he laughed to himself as he walked on with bent head in the teeth of the bitter, east wind.

Referring once again to the list of professional lodgings, he consulted the porter who told him which was the nearest house, and here he at last got taken in, by a dishevelled but smiling landlady.

"There's Mr. Dudley, one of Mr. Skoot's company, in my house now," she said. "Maybe you could share the sitting-room."

Ralph hesitated, but without more ado the woman stepped into her front parlour and put the case to the present occupant.

"Oh, by all means," said a hearty voice; and the door was thrown back and into the narrow passage stepped a tall, powerful-looking man of about forty, his large, clean-shaven face, twinkling eyes, and broad mouth full of good humour. Ralph knew at a glance that it was not at all a face of high type, but it was genial and attractive and it contrasted most singularly with the forbidding face of the widow who only housed Christians.

"Come in, my boy," said the hearty voice; "you look half frozen."

"It was the landlady's proposal," said Ralph. "You are sure you don't mind?"

"To be sure not! 'Mine enemy's dog, though he had bit me, should stand this night against my fire.' Skoot was telling me about you. The little brute has called a special rehearsal; you had better look sharp and get something to eat for there's no knowing how long they will keep us at it. The Skoots were always great hands at rehearsing."

"You have travelled with them before?"

"Yes, many years ago, and there's not much love lost between us. Shouldn't have taken this berth now, if I hadn't been out of an engagement for some time. I have my doubts if the tour will be a success. Skoot is awfully hampered, you see, by having to run his wife as leading lady."

Ralph prudently forbore to make any comment, but the thought of acting with Mrs. Skoot was a sort of nightmare to him.

"Have the rest of the company all arrived?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so. There's little Ivy Grant—she's coming on very well indeed, devilish pretty girl into the bargain. Then there's Miss Myra Kay, a brunette,

rather prudish, used to be in Macneillie's company, but lost her health, and is now only just starting afresh. As for the men—well, you'll see for yourself by-and-by—half of them in my opinion are sticks, and the other half roaring ranters. Hulloa, you'll find that a bad speculation. Never order coffee in Great Britain, for they don't know how to make it. Take to whisky, my boy. It's the only thing for strolling players."

"Thanks, I detest it," said Ralph, "and if professional landladies don't understand coffee-making, why I'll brew it myself as we used to do at Winchester."

"I thought you had been at a public school. What made you take up with the stage? Didn't your people object?"

"I am alone in the world," said Ralph. "My guardian wanted me to be a parson, but I couldn't go in for that, and so, being turned out of his house, I thought I would try to realise an old dream of mine and be an actor."

Dudley had watched him keenly during this speech. He was a man who had led a notoriously evil life, but he had a good deal of kindliness in his nature, and there was something in Ralph's transparent honesty, in his evident purity of heart and life that appealed to him. Bad as his own record had been he was wholly without the fiendish desire to drag other men down with him.

"Your dreams were probably very unlike the reality," he said, with a smile. "Are you prepared to rough it?"

Ralph laughed, and gave him the account of the straits he had been reduced to, and Dudley having described the merits and drawbacks of a provincial tour under Skoot's management, suggested that they had better be setting off for the rehearsal.

They had scarcely opened the stage door when Mrs. Skoot's shrill voice made itself heard. She was vehemently complaining about some mistake made by the

baggage man, and the poor harassed culprit stood meekly to receive her angry threats of dismissal, not daring to proffer excuse or explanation. Ivy looking scared and cold, stood not far off; her whole face lighted up when she caught sight of Ralph, and she stole over to whisper in his ear, "Isn't Mrs. Skoot dreadful?"

"Suggests the queen in 'Alice in Wonderland,'" he replied, smiling. "Off with his head!"

Ivy was obliged to laugh a little.

"That is Miss Myra Kay," she said, indicating a pale, slim girl, who was pacing to and fro, book in hand. "I think she is very selfish; they say she hardly speaks to any one, but just takes care of herself and is quite wrapped up in her own affairs."

"Take care," said Ralph, warningly; "you may be overheard."

Dudley now introduced him to one or two of the actors, and before long the manager himself arrived. He seemed in good spirits, greeted Ralph pleasantly, pacified his wife, and promptly set them all to work.

Only too soon, however, they realised that the length of the rehearsal depended on Mrs. Skoot and not on her husband. Although it was no business of hers she seemed unable to refrain from constant interruption and fault-finding, and before the evening was over she had reduced Miss Kay to tears, had tormented poor Ivy into the worst of tempers and had goaded most of the men into a state of sullen wrath.

At last, after four hours of this, Mr. Skoot looked at his watch and announced that it was half-past eleven. Time was the only thing which had ever been known to conquer Mrs. Skoot; she wisely bowed to the inevitable, and having reminded Miss Kay that the call was for eleven on the following morning, she allowed herself to be helped into a handsome fur cloak, and telling Ivy to follow her, quitted the theatre.

Ralph went back to his rooms in low spirits and the next morning did not much mend matters, for they were kept rehearsing from eleven in the morning till five in the afternoon. Had it not been for Dudley's unfailing good humour, his flashes of fun, and his genial kindliness, Ralph thought he could not have endured so great a contrast to the whole atmosphere of Washington's theatre.

He began to feel a sort of angry contempt for the manager who seemed but a tool in the hands of his wife and was quite indifferent to the annoyance she gave to others.

But in the evening when "Macbeth" was given, when, for the first time in his life, he had one of Shakspere's characters to portray, he forgot all the previous misery. Into the comparatively small part of *Malcolm* he had put an amount of thought and study and imagination which surprised Dudley, and the elder man, as they walked home together, spoke words of hearty commendation and encouragement which cheered the novice's heart as nothing else could have done.

On the day before they were to leave Dumfries for Ayr, it chanced that, being released earlier than usual from rehearsal, Ralph suggested a walk to Ivy. It was the first chance they had had for any sort of relaxation, and Ivy listened with delight to the proposal of a visit to the grave of Burns and to Lincluden Abbey.

She was not at all pleased when as they drew near to the Burns' mausoleum they caught sight of Myra Kay. As yet Ralph had made no way at all with this pale, dark-eyed girl, they had scarcely exchanged a dozen words, and her manner was very reserved and distant. All that he knew about her was the little he had gleaned from the men of the company. It was reported that her marriage was to take place in the summer, and that she was engaged to an actor named Brinton who was now in

Macneillie's Company. She had the reputation of being cold, cautious, and conventional, but in comparison with Mrs. Skoot she was so delightful that Ralph felt drawn to her and was chafed by a perfectly clear consciousness that for some reason she disapproved of him. He was pleased when she volunteered a few tepid remarks about Turnerelli's sculpture, and to Ivy's disgust he asked her if she would not join them in their walk to Lincluden Abbey.

She hesitated for a moment, then with a glance at his open, boyish face seemed suddenly to arrive at some determination more important than that of the mere decision to take a walk.

"I will come part of the way with you," she said. "But since my illness I am not much of a walker. It is one of the few grudges I harbour against Mr. Macneillie."

"You were in his Company?"

"Yes, and at Oxford, while playing in an outdoor representation of 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' got soaked to the skin and had to wear the wet clothes. The rest of them escaped with colds but I was laid up for six months. The manager was extremely good to me I must say, and in August I hope to be back again in his Company."

"You like him then as a manager?"

"Yes, indeed, there couldn't be a better. I don't know how I shall ever endure all these months with the Skoots, and had I known that that scoundrel Dudley was to be in the Company I should never have accepted the engagement."

Ralph raised his eyebrows. "That's a severe word," he said.

"It's no more than he deserves," said Myra Kay, frowning. "I am astonished that you can share rooms with him and make him your friend."

"He is very likely no worse than many others," said Ralph, nettled by her tone.

"No worse!" she said, scornfully. "Is it possible you do not know that he is the wretch who figured in the Houston case? You must remember it—the stir was so great and it is not eighteen months ago."

"I was at school eighteen months ago and never troubled my head with *causes celèbres*."

Myra Kay walked on in silence for a few moments; then she briefly told him the facts of the case and was pleased to see him wince.

"The man has been properly punished," she continued, with satisfaction, "and now no decent manager will have him—at any rate, till the details of the case are forgotten. He is desperately hard up for money, and every one cuts him. I hope, now that you know all this, you will have no more to say to him."

"Perhaps he has turned over a new leaf," said Ralph, looking up from the discoloured track where they were walking to the pure white fields beyond.

Myra Kay gave a sarcastic little laugh.

"You are far too innocent, Mr. Denmead," she said; and Ralph thought there was an unpleasant touch of patronage in her tone. "Does he look as if he were repenting?"

"Men can't go about in sackcloth and ashes," said Ralph; "and you surely wouldn't have him cultivate a face a yard long? It's his nature to be full of fun, and, for my part, I would far rather have to do with a man who has been openly punished than with a hypocrite who sins with impunity and goes about posing as a philanthropist."

He thought resentfully of Sir Matthew.

"I can't think how you can speak to him," said Myra Kay bitterly. "For your own sake, and for the sake of the profession, you ought to have nothing to do with

him. It was not just a common case of wrongdoing—it was a specially atrocious affair throughout. They say you are the son of a clergyman. I should have thought you would have had better judgment than to mix yourself up with such a man."

"He is precisely the sort of man my father would have befriended," said Ralph, warmly. "There was nothing of the Pharisee about him. I remember how, when all the village cut a man who had been in prison for some bad offence, he found out the fellow's one vulnerable point—a love of flowers—and had him up with us at the Rectory the whole of one Bank-holiday, pottering about the garden and greenhouse, and as happy as a king in exchanging plants with us, and helping to bud roses."

"That may be well enough for a clergyman, but for you—a mere boy, knowing so little of the world—it is different. You ought not to have chosen such a man as your companion."

"I didn't choose him," said Ralph, with some warmth. "An 'unco guid' widow shut the door in my face, because I was an actor, and said she only took in Christians. Then at the next place I went to they gave me shelter and kind words, and Dudley was goodness itself to me. If I cut him now I should be a contemptible cad."

"Well," said his companion, with a shrug of her shoulders, "you must 'gang your own gait.' But remember that I have warned you."

She turned back soon after this, and Ivy, who had thought the whole discussion very tiresome, skipped for joy when a bend in the road hid her from view.

But Ralph seemed unusually silent, and as they looked at the ruins of the old abbey, Ivy could not at all understand the shadow that seemed to have come over his face.

Not a word ever passed Dudley's lips about his pre-

vious life, but there were not lacking people who promptly told him that Ralph Denmead had just learnt all about it; and when they moved on to Ayr, he said in his blunt way:

"You'll not care that we should pig together any longer, I daresay?"

"I had much rather share diggings with you than with any of the others," said Ralph, heartily. "If I'm not in your way, that is? You are the only man who has shown me the least kindness."

Dudley made an inarticulate exclamation. He was more touched than he would have cared to own.

"You are thankful for small mercies," he said, "and gratitude is a rare thing in the profession. But I like you, lad, and am glad to have you as a chum. You shall not have cause to be ashamed of me."

And so throughout the strange vicissitudes of the Scotch tour these two oddly-contrasting characters bore each other company, and for some time Myra Kay kept aloof from them both.

CHAPTER XII

"All these anxieties will be good for you. They all go to the making of a man—calling out that God-dependence in him which is the only true self-dependence, the only true strength."—LETTERS OF CHARLES KINGSLEY.

DURING the first month Theophilus Skoot's Company prospered as well as could be expected. A week at Glasgow and a week at Edinburgh, with full houses, cheered every one; but after that, as they went northward, the days of dearth began. It was now past the middle of March, and the old proverb,

> **"As the light lengthens**
> **The cold strengthens,"**

was fulfilling itself in very bitter fashion. Perhaps people were disinclined to turn out of their comfortable homes on such bleak evenings; at any rate, the week at Stirling proved a dead failure, and Perth was wrestling with the influenza demon, and had little leisure to bestow on strolling players.

It was here that one evening Ralph, for the first time, learnt what it is to work without a salary.

He was sitting on a basket, waiting for his cue, with "Pendennis" to cheer him into forgetfulness of fatigue and cold, when Dudley returned to the dressing-room, with an odd look lurking about the corners of his mouth.

"The ghost walks," he said, in sepulchral tones.

"What do you mean?" said Ralph, laughing.

"It's all very well to laugh. You won't be able to do that long. There's no treasury to-morrow, my boy. 'The manager regrets,' etc., etc."

"No treasury!" echoed Ralph, blankly.

"I'm not surprised," said Dudley; "I was always doubtful whether Skoot would hold out long. But we may have better luck at Dundee."

"And if not, how are we to live?" asked Ralph, recollecting how small a sum he had to fall back upon.

"Why, my dear boy, we must live like the birds of the air, who eat other folk's property, and then fly away."

Ralph looked gloomy.

"Well, after all," he said, "the debts will virtually be Skoot's, not ours. And, as you say, other places may not be so bad as Perth has been."

This was exactly what the manager observed as they journeyed on from town to town. He was always apologetic, always bland and pleasant; but not another penny was ever forthcoming. In other respects, however, the tour was less unpleasant than at first. The rehearsals were shorter, and Mrs. Skoot did not venture to irritate them quite so much, but solaced herself instead with whisky. Moreover, their common trouble formed a sort of bond of union between the members of the Company; they grumbled together, and cheered each other up; they were extraordinarily kind in helping one another; all the little jealousies and quarrels were forgotten in the general anxiety and distress. As to Myra Kay, she was like another being altogether; she nursed Ivy through a long and tedious cold, she forgave Ralph for his friendship with Dudley, and she discussed ways and means in the most helpful fashion. Her experience and good advice were of considerable use to Ralph, while, when their prospects were at the darkest, Ivy managed to extract comfort from dreams about the future, and would listen by the hour to Myra's plans for the summer, and to discussions about her wedding and her trousseau.

And so the weary weeks dragged on, until at last, towards the end of April, they found themselves at Inverness. By this time they were all beginning to grow desperate for want of money, and Ralph, after a hard struggle with himself, conquered his pride and wrote to old Mr. Marriott, telling him of the plight he was in. It was not until the last day of their engagement at Inverness that the reply, bearing the name of the firm on the envelope, was placed in his hands. He tore it open eagerly and turned pale as he read the contents:

"BASINGHALL STREET, E. C.
"*27th April.*

"DEAR SIR,

"With reference to your letter of the 25th inst., I beg to inform you that Mr. Marriott has been very dangerously ill with influenza, and to recruit his health he has been ordered to take a voyage to Australia. I regret that in his absence I do not feel myself at liberty to make you any advance. I am, dear sir, yours truly,

"W. G. MAUNDER."

The next day they moved on to Elgin. The manager looked miserable and depressed; Mrs. Skoot, though not quite sober, read novels more assiduously than ever, and among the actors there were loud complaints, and angry threatenings of a strike. At Elgin the audiences were better than might have been expected, and the Skoots seemed to revive a little as they moved on to the neighbouring town of Forres. But the luckless Company still toiled unpaid.

Ralph's patience was now almost exhausted. Ivy had received piteous letters telling of her grandfather's difficulties, and every day it seemed less and less probable that they would ever again receive their salaries from the manager.

Forres certainly did not look like a place where they would attract large audiences, and an indescribable feeling of hopelessness stole over him as he gazed at the old gabled houses and at the one long, irregular street which formed the chief part of the town. How much longer could he possibly endure the weary, distasteful life? The halls with their miserable accommodation behind the scenes—for in few towns had they found a proper theatre;—the cheap lodgings with their dirty rooms; the daily marketing under difficulties; and the revolting spectacle of Mrs. Skoot drowning her discomfiture in drink—all these had become intolerable.

"Let us go for a walk," said Ivy, despairingly. "At any rate out of doors we can have air and sunshine—we shall have enough of our wretched rooms later on."

"Come and see the river," said Myra Kay. "They say there are lovely views by the Findhorn."

Ralph consented, and the three walked out together into the country, and did their best to forget the troubles that hemmed them in, as they wandered among the flowery fields, where Ivy gathered violets and primroses to her heart's content. Presently by the river, among the soft early green of the bushes, they came to a fallen tree, and here they established themselves while Ralph read to them. They had indulged in two or three of Dickens' novels at an old bookstall in Edinburgh in their days of plenty, and when fortune frowned upon them these shabby volumes had proved a perfect godsend. They had solaced many a cold journey and brightened many a dreary lodging-house, and they helped now to distract them from the thought of their daily increasing troubles.

It seemed to Ivy when she looked back afterwards, that this afternoon by the Findhorn was the last really happy day she was ever to know. She sat cosily ensconced on the tree trunk with her lap full of flowers which she delighted in arranging; and Ralph lay on the

grass at her feet with his head propped against the smooth surface of the fallen beech tree. She noticed how the short waves of his crisp, brown hair contrasted with the silver-grey of the bark, and how the careworn look which had grown upon him during the tour was entirely banished now as flashes of mirth passed over his face, caused by the sayings of Grip the raven.

Myra Kay sat just beyond him; she was knitting socks for her *fiancé*, listening at times to the reading, but more often dreaming of her own future. Everywhere there was that sense of hope and joyous expectation that seems to belong to the spring-time: the birds sang as Ivy had never heard them sing before; the lambs frisked delightfully in the soft, green meadows near their somewhat uninteresting mothers; and into her half-taught, eager mind there somehow floated new ideas of the meaning of "green pastures and still waters," and a firmer confidence in a Shepherd who would not forget even the members of a travelling company in grievous straits up in the north of Scotland.

"Oh don't let us go just yet!" she exclaimed, as Ralph closed the book. "It can't be time to go back to those stuffy rooms."

"I'm in no hurry," said Ralph, stretching himself, and falling back into a more comfortable attitude.

He could not see Ivy's face, but he could see her little, slender fingers as they pulled the petals off a daisy. The result seemed to displease her; she threw away the remains of the flower, and gathering another diligently pulled off each pink-tipped petal, but again threw the stalk from her with a little impatient gesture. Then she began upon a third, and had become absorbed in her counting, when suddenly she felt Ralph's hand lay hold of hers.

"Caught in the act," he said, laughing. "Don't you know that fortune-telling is illegal?"

"Not if you tell your own," said Ivy.

Something in her voice made him look at her, and for the first time in her little childish face he detected an expression which made him clearly understand that he was not dealing with a mere girl but with a woman. Long ago he had realised that her hard experience of life had robbed Ivy of the innocent ignorance which had kept Evereld so young; but he had naturally fallen into the habit of treating her as he would have treated any other girl of fifteen with whom he was brought into constant companionship. Thinking it over now it suddenly occurred to him that during the Scotch tour Ivy had lost her brisk, managing way, that she was very different from the independent little being who ordered the Professor's affairs for him, that she had become unnaturally fond of being helped and protected. An uncomfortable fear crossed his mind, but he thought it best to laugh and try to change the subject.

"Are you doing the old thing that Evereld and I used to be fond of!—'Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor?' And have you always been fated to wed the thief that you throw away one daisy after another?"

"That's a silly old rhyme," said Ivy. "Of course I should never think of marrying any one who wasn't in the profession."

"Oh, that's quite a mistake," said Ralph, lightly, determined that he must be cruel only to be kind. "Two of a trade seldom agree, you know. You should marry a dreamy philosopher who needed waking up, and being looked after."

Ivy blushed, and was silent, and Ralph was not sorry to be taken to task by Myra Kay for his rash assertion that two of a trade never agreed. They fell into a merry bantering discussion during which Ivy recovered herself.

After all, she reflected, why should she be unhappy because he had teased her a little? His words no doubt

meant nothing at all; she would not spoil this happy afternoon by tormenting herself.

"To-morrow's my birthday," she said, gaily, as they walked back to Forres. "I'm going to be sixteen. There's no rehearsal, and I vote that we three have a real picnic."

"Carried unanimously," said Ralph. "We might go as far as this Heronry they speak of. The longer we are out of our dismal diggings the better."

The play that night was "Macbeth," and anything more unlike the arrangements at Washington's theatre it would be impossible to conceive. Mr. Skoot was apologetic, Mrs. Skoot endeavoured to be very affable, and the Company with that readiness to perceive fun, and the real good-nature which never failed them in an emergency, made the best of the many discomforts. They dressed behind screens, they laughed and joked, they had wild hunts for lost belongings, and they chattered incessantly between the acts under cover of the noisiest piano-playing which could be produced by one of the ladies, who, with a waterproof cloak over her costume, did duty as the entire orchestra.

A choice selection of Scotch airs was being hammered out at the close of the Fourth Act, when Ralph, who was groping in a heap of miscellaneous garments in hopes of rescuing the wig he had worn as first murderer, and had hastily thrown off during a desperately hurried change into *Malcolm's* attire, found himself close to Dudley.

"The manager is positively enjoying himself," said the comedian. "Skoot is after all a wonderful man. I shouldn't wonder if he was persuading himself that this confounded tour will prove a success. That fellow lives on dreams. His wife is the one for business."

At that moment Mrs. Skoot, in the most elegant of stage nightdresses, and with her taper all ready to be lighted at the right moment, appeared for the sleep-

walking scene. Ralph often wondered what effect she had at a distance; the near view of her was appalling.

"I am afraid you have a great deal to put up with," she said, in unusually gracious tones, smiling in a ghastly way beneath her paint. "But we must all learn to take the fortune of war. Our next place will be comfortable enough."

They were joined just then by Myra Kay in the costume of the *Gentlewoman-in-Waiting.*

Mrs. Skoot, who, as a rule, was at daggers drawn with her, accosted her now pleasantly enough.

"I hear that you and Ivy have planned an excursion for to-morrow?" she said. "Come and breakfast with us at nine o'clock before the start. And you, too, Mr. Denmead."

They accepted the invitation in some surprise, and as the curtain was rung up Mrs. Skoot requested Dudley to light her taper, and presently sailed on to the stage for her great scene, leaving them in astonishment at her unwonted good-humour.

The next day Ralph went, as he had promised, to the manager's rooms in time for breakfast. He was within a few yards of the door when he came upon the heavy man, and his son, a young and very indifferent actor who usually played four or five small parts.

"Have you heard the news?" they exclaimed. "The Company's dried up."

"What?" said Ralph, in dismay.

"The manager has absconded," said the heavy man, pompously. "Went off by the first train this morning. It seems that last night when we were all safely out of the way the baggage man took everything to the station. Then Skoot and his wife stole out of their lodgings early this morning without rousing a soul, and here we are landed high and dry in the north-east of Scotland. Pleasant prospect, isn't it?"

Ralph felt indeed that they were in a desperate plight. He moved on mechanically to the open door of the manager's rooms, and caught sight of a little group in the entrance passage.

The landlady, shrill-voiced and indignant, was telling the whole story to Myra Kay; and Ivy, with an open letter in her hand, and traces of tears on her little, piquant face stood close by.

She was the first to catch sight of him, and hastened forward to greet him.

"Oh, Ralph, I'm so glad you have come!" she exclaimed, piteously. "What am I to do? What can I do?"

CHAPTER XIII

"Who bides his time—he tastes the sweet
Of honey in the saltest tear;
And though he fares with slowest feet,
Joy runs to meet him, drawing near;
The birds are heralds of his cause,
And like a never-ending rhyme
The roadsides bloom in his applause,
Who bides his time."

J. W. RILEY.

"HAVE you had bad news from home?" asked Ralph, taking the letter which Ivy held towards him.

"Yes," she said, in a broken voice. "They have had to move my grandfather to the hospital."

It was but too clear, as Ralph at once perceived from the letter, that the old Professor was never likely to recover, and that Ivy's home had ceased to exist. The landlady wrote to demand rent, and since it was impossible to pay this, there would doubtless be a sale of the Professor's few belongings.

And here was this pretty girl of sixteen, stranded, without a penny in her possession, in a remote Scotch town, where it was impossible to meet with an engagement.

"What am I to do?" she said, lifting her piteous eyes to his with an appeal that moved him more than he quite liked. He wished that he had not guessed her secret on the previous day, and that he could treat her once more in the matter-of-fact-elder-brotherly fashion which he

had once adopted. But this was no longer possible; nay, he felt an almost irresistible longing to say to her: "I will take care of you. We will set the world at defiance, and bear our troubles together."

Fortunately he thought of Evereld, and instantly tried to picture her in the same plight. How would he have felt towards a man who had taken advantage of her poverty and helplessness to place her in a position which must, more or less, have compromised her?

He folded the letter and gave it back.

"Don't worry yourself more than you can help," he said, kindly. "I will talk things over with the others, and we will manage somehow to get you back to London."

But discussion threw very little light on the main difficulty of how to raise the necessary money. Every member of the company was desperately poor, and although Myra Kay offered to take charge of Ivy as far as London, she had only just enough money to pay for her own railway ticket. Some intended to go back to Inverness, others were setting out for Edinburgh or Glasgow, and all were grumbling loudly, and anathematising the Skoots who could scarcely have chosen a more inconvenient place than Forres for their flight.

He had counted a good deal on Dudley's good nature; but the comedian proved the most unsatisfactory adviser of all.

"Oh don't worry your head about Ivy Grant," he said. "Depend upon it such a pretty girl will win her way somehow or other. It's much more to the point what you and I are to do."

Ralph did not stay to argue the question. Myra Kay was to leave by the next train for the south, and he was determined that somehow or other Ivy must go with her. He went up to his room, threw most of his possessions into a portmanteau, and went to try his fortune

at the pawnbrokers. It was broad daylight, but he had long ago ceased to feel any shame at being reduced to such straits. He went to-day, however, with a heavy heart; for he was only too well aware that he could not hope to raise much money on the few shabby clothes, and the wigs, shoes, and such like, which had supplemented the theatrical costumes provided by Skoot. Many weeks before, his father's watch and chain had been parted with, so that he had nothing of much value, and his spirits sank lower and lower as the pawnbroker checked off the garments one by one at terribly small prices.

In the very atmosphere of the shop there seemed something depressing; tales of sordid misery seemed woven in with the shabby rugs and carpets, the stacks of heterogeneous clothing; and tragedies seemed bound up with the workmen's tools, the musical instruments, the relics of household furniture.

"Twenty-five shillin's and saxpence," said the master of the shop. "Will I be makin' oot the teeckets?"

"What's the price of a third single to London?" asked Ralph. "I must raise enough for that."

"Ye canna do it, sir, not with these, it's juist beyon' ony man's contrivin'. Why I'm thinkin' the teecket to London will be a matter of twa punds."

He appealed to his assistant.

"It's preceesely forty-two shillin' and saxpence," said the young man, regarding the actor with some interest.

"There's still the portmanteau," said Ralph.

It was an old one of the rector's, solid and good of its kind.

"I'll gie ye a couple o' shillin's for it," said the pawnbroker. "But ye'll no be gettin' to London, sir, upon twenty-seven and saxpence."

"It must be done," said Ralph, with a determined look which took the Scotchman's fancy. "Make out those tickets, and I'll be with you again in five minutes."

"The laddie's weel-bred," said the old man to himself. "He'll win his way depend on it, there's grit in him. Yon's none of your false French polishin'; it's sound, good breedin' and grit."

Ralph, true to his word, appeared again in a few minutes carrying a Gladstone bag, an overcoat, and a mackintosh. The bag with the change of linen in it which he had hoped to keep, went for a little more than he had expected, and with the overcoat brought in enough money for the journey, and ninepence to spare. He decided not to part with the mackintosh, and gathering up his sheaf of tickets, bade the old Scotsman good-day, and went at once to the manager's deserted rooms.

Ivy had grown tired of talking to the landlady, and being in spite of her troubles exceedingly hungry, had taken her place at the forlorn breakfast table, and was trying to find comfort in a cup of cold coffee.

"Come, that's a good idea," said Ralph, cheerfully. "And now I think of it, I, too, am hungry. Why should we not eat? After Mrs. Skoot's pressing invitation it's a clear duty!"

Ivy smiled, and began to fill his cup for him.

"What do the rest of the company think I had better do?" she asked, anxiously.

"They all agree that you had better go back to London with Miss Kay. She will not be able to take you home with her, but I've been thinking it over, and I'm sure your best way will be to go to my old landlady Mrs. Dan Doolan. She is the soul of good-nature and as long as they have a crust in the house they will share it with you."

"But I don't know them, and I can't go and beg," said Ivy, with an air of distaste.

"I will write a letter to them which will explain everything," said Ralph. "They are good, trustworthy people who will see that no harm happens to you; they will. I

daresay, house you while you look for another engagement."

"How am I to get the money for my ticket?"

"I will see to that for you."

"But you have no money?"

"Are you so sure of that?" said Ralph, smiling as he rattled the coins in his pocket cheerfully.

The girl's face brightened. "You have enough for both of us?"

"I am going to stay in Scotland. I shall keep enough to get along with, you needn't be anxious."

But this was quite too much for Ivy, she hid her face and burst into tears.

"I can't go alone," she sobbed. "I won't take your money, and leave you behind in this horrid place. Oh, please, please let us stay together."

For a minute he wavered—the sight of her tears was almost more than he could endure; the sunshine streaming in through the uncurtained window turned her brown hair to gold, and revealed in a way that half-dazzled him the wonderful grace of every line of her figure. With an effort, he turned away, and began doggedly to pace the room till he recovered himself, and, with that instinct for straightforward dealing which always characterised him, frankly answered her suggestion.

"That would never do: you will see if you think for a minute. You are no longer a child, and people would say horrible things about you."

"But you always say we are not to trouble about slanders. You don't like conventional people, and yet here you would have me made miserable, for fear unkind tongues should talk."

"We can't throw aside all conventions," said Ralph; "many of them are good and useful in their way. Are you and I so superhuman that we can afford to do without all safeguards? I know you think me hard-hearted,

but some day you'll thank me for persuading you to go with Miss Kay."

Ivy shook her head. "It's because you don't really like me; you mean to be kind, just kind and nothing more. I hate your kindness!"

All the grief and love and passion that was pent up in her heart seemed to break loose into this wild, little speech.

Ralph began to pace the room again, he understood her only too well, and he was sorely perplexed as to what he should do. At last he came to the somewhat original determination to treat her as he would have liked in her place to be treated. He sat down by her, and said quietly:

"We are all of us unhinged this morning, but I want you, Ivy, to try and see things as they really are. I'm going to tell you what not another soul in the world knows, for it will help you to see how we stand. I have a friend in England who is as yet only my friend, but I'm presumptuous enough to dream—to hope that some day she will be my wife."

"Then very naturally you can't care much what happens to other girls," said Ivy, perversely.

"I care a hundred times more," said Ralph. "It is just through her that I have learnt to reverence all women. Were she in your plight up here in Forres should I not think any man a brute who risked her good name, who didn't do his utmost to shield her and help her unselfishly?"

Ivy did not reply; her wistful blue eyes were fixed on his now with the questioning look of a child who is trying to grasp some quite new idea. She had seen all through her precocious childhood and girlhood a great deal that called itself love, but was only selfishness and animal passion, and now through her sorrow and disappointment she was beginning faintly to perceive another

kind of love altogether, a love that was divine and ennobling. It was just a far-away glimpse such as she had gained of the landscape one day, when, in spite of cloudy weather, they had climbed Moncrieffe Hill, and as the mist every now and then cleared off for a few minutes, they had seen the sun shining on lovely scenery far far in the distance. She had the same sense now that the glimpse of love she had gained was real and true, and that the mist was a mere passing discomfort.

"I am sorry I was angry," she exclaimed. "I don't mean what I said, then. I like you to be my friend and to help me—at least if it's right for me to let you."

"Of course it's right," said Ralph. "Didn't your grandfather trust me to take you down to Scotland and place you with Mrs. Skoot? I owe it to him since she has deserted you, to see you safely back in London, and I will write a line at once to Mrs. Dan Doolan explaining things."

"Thank you," she said, in a sad, meek little voice. And as he began to write, her little, sensible, managing ways came back to her and she began to cut thick slices of bread and butter and wrap them up for the journey. She then consoled the landlady with her travelling trunk, packed her few possessions into the smallest compass possible, and by the time Myra Kay called for her, was waiting ready dressed, looking, indeed, very pale, but with an air of determination about her firm little mouth which Ralph could not help admiring.

There was a great bustle of departure, but when he had posted his letters and had taken Ivy's ticket and stood alone outside the railway carriage with nothing more to do, a sense of loneliness began to steal over him. For the first time it occurred to any one to ask what plans he had made for himself.

"Where are you going, Mr. Denmead?" said Myra Kay.

"I'm going to take a walking tour," said Ralph, lightly; "probably I shall work my way down to Glasgow, and try for an engagement there. By-the-bye, where is Macneillie's Company now?"

"Just dispersed," said Myra, cheerfully, as she reflected that her lover would be in London to meet her. "Macneillie generally winds up soon after Whitsuntide and starts again at the beginning of August. He has promised to take me on again then."

"If he has an opening you might say a word for me," said Ralph, "and Ivy, let me have a line to say how you get on. I shall have to call for letters at the Stirling post-office, for I hope to hear of an engagement by that time."

Just at that moment he was hailed by a familiar voice from a smoking carriage, and looking round he saw Dudley leaning out of the window.

"So you are off to the south, too!" he said. "Lucky fellow, how did you manage it?"

The train had already begun to move, but the comedian with a beaming face still leant out of the window describing to the last moment the extraordinary run of luck he had had at billiards.

"Go and play the same game," he counselled; "it's the only way to raise the wind. Good-bye, my boy! Meet again in better times."

He waved his hand cheerfully and was borne away, but the thing which lingered longest in Ralph's sight was Ivy's wistful, little face, as to the very last she gazed back at him.

CHAPTER XIV

"And forth into the fields I went,
And nature's living motion lent
The pulse of hope to discontent.

"I wonder'd at the bounteous hours
The slow results of winter showers;
You scarce could see the grass for flowers.

"I wonder'd while I paced along;
The woods were fill'd so full with song,
There seem'd no room for sense of wrong."
"The Two Voices," TENNYSON.

IT was just ten minutes past eleven by the station clock when Ralph, having parted with his companions, found himself outside in the highroad. He felt horribly desolate, and stood for a minute or two dismally contemplating a flaming red and yellow placard of a scene in "Cramond Brig," which they had invariably played after "East Lynne." Wretched as his experiences with the Company had been, they had at least been less dreary than solitude. He sorely missed Ivy's bright face, and the comedian's cheerful companionship. There was a certain bitterness too in the reflection that no one had taken much thought of what was to become of him, and that even Dudley, who had been kind and friendly enough in the past, had never dreamt of foregoing his journey to London and of taking two tickets to Glasgow.

With a last look at Forres he turned his steps southward and somewhat drearily set off on the first stage of his journey. He meant to reach Grantown that even-

ing, and Grantown appeared to be at least two and twenty miles off. Fortunately the weather was all in his favour: it was one of those mornings of early May when the sun is bright and warm and the air deliciously fresh, and he had not gone far along the uphill road before his spirits revived. After all he was young and in good health, and there was something not altogether unpleasant in entire independence. He reflected with a laugh that although a change of clothes might be desirable, a knapsack would have been heavy to carry, that the great coat though useful on a cold night would have been unbearable at the present moment, and that the sixpence left to him after stamping the letter to his landlady and letters to the managers of an Edinburgh and a Glasgow theatre, would at any rate keep him for a few days from actual starvation. Then for a while he forgot his difficulties altogether in sheer enjoyment of the country. The lovely outline of the Cluny hills, the glimpses of the river Findhorn, the beautiful parks surrounding many stately houses, looked their very best on this perfect spring morning. He caught the glowing sunlight through the young leaves just unfolded and thought that the delicate tracery of dark boughs seemed as though ablaze with emeralds. He had walked for about two hours when he came to a little country church and burial ground, and paused partly to rest, partly to look up at the beautiful viaduct which at a great height spanned the river Divie.

"Ay, ay," said a voice, that seemed to rise from one of the graves. "There are many tourists that stop to admire yonder seven-arched work of man's devising, but few—very few that pay much heed to the works of the Almighty."

There was a strong northern accent about the words; and the careful, precise English showed that the speaker was better used to reading than to speaking the language.

Ralph had started a little at the suddenness with which the silence had been broken, and on turning round, he saw a venerable-looking old man with bushy grey hair and beard, and shrewd yet kindly glance. Evidently he was the minister of this place. Ralph raised his hat, and smiled a little.

"May not the skill of man be taken as one of God's works?" he said.

"No doubt, no doubt," replied the minister. "When rightly applied that is to say. But railways, sir, are the devil's own weapon; they desolate and mar the country they enter; they bring to the country folk all the evil of the towns and cities. You have a prophet in your own land that has told you this in plain words, but you will not heed him, but go on multiplying the works of evil to your own undoing."

"On such a day as this I am all in favour of walking," said Ralph, amused at the minister's earnestness.

"Sir! it's a grand exercise, you'll not be finding a better; there are your bicycles that bend a man's back like an overstrung bow, and your tricycles that are no light diversion to push up our Scottish hills, and there are those works of the evil one which whirl you through creation at such a pace that you are no wiser at the end of a journey than you were at the beginning of it. But a man that walks, sir, must be blind and deaf if he's not a better man after his walk than he was before."

"Well, I shall be able to test your theory," said Ralph. "For I am walking as far as Glasgow."

"And which way will you be taking?" asked the minister. "You should spend a few days among the Grampians, if you are anything of a mountaineer."

"I must push on as fast as I can," said Ralph; "and by the most direct route. They told me at Forres that after Grantown I had better make for Kingussie."

"If you'll come into the Manse, I will show you on

the map the very route I have often travelled myself in past days," said the minister. And Ralph, nothing loth, followed him into his house, and was soon poring over a big ordnance map, and receiving some very helpful information from the old man.

They were interrupted before long by a knock at the door, and the appearance of an aged housekeeper with a large, well-fed, tabby cat in her arms.

"The feesh is on the table, sir, and it's a sair temptation for puss, puir wee thing, starving hungry as she is."

Ralph sprang up to take leave, glancing humourously at the fat tabby, who was in such haste for her food. The minister noted the glance; he noted, too, for the first time, the extreme shabbiness of his guest's clothes, and certain signs of under-feeding about him.

"We'll no keep puss waiting, Tibbie," he said. "But just lay another place at the table, for I hope this gentleman has time to dine with me." Then as Ralph hesitated to accept the hospitality he overruled all objections by adding: "You'll be doing me a real kindness if you'll stay, for it is not very often that I get a visitor to talk with in this country place."

He led the way as he spoke into the adjoining room, a plainly-furnished parlour with nothing ornamental about it, but with a certain charm of its own, nevertheless, from its pure cleanliness and simplicity. Puss occupied a chair on her master's right hand, and purred loudly through the somewhat long grace, and Tibbie, having provided for the wants of the visitor, left them to enjoy the meal in peace. For dinner at the Manse was not an affair with many courses, but just freshly-caught fish from the river, baps baked that morning by the housekeeper, a salad from the garden, and the remains of a cheese which had been a present to the minister on New Year's day.

"Now the majority of travellers, as I was saying,"

continued the minister, "are just hurried over the viaduct, causing us nothing but distraction and annoyance, but a pedestrian like yourself really sees the place, and cheers the day for us and brings us something to think about."

"I spent the first thirteen years of my life in a country rectory," said Ralph. "And remember what a quiet time we had."

"And are you studying for the ministry?" asked the old man.

"No," said Ralph. "My guardian gave me the chance of doing that, but I think you will agree that one can't be a parson just for the sake of earning a living."

"Certainly not, sir, certainly not. You are quite in the right. No man should take up such work without a clear call; far better seek some other profession."

"That is what I did," said Ralph, colouring a little. "But I know very well that you'll not approve of my profession. I am an actor, and am on my way now to Stirling where I hope to hear of a fresh engagement either at Edinburgh or at Glasgow."

Surprise, consternation, regret, were plainly visible in the old man's face. He said nothing for a moment, it bewildered him to find that this young fellow with his straightforward manner and ingenuous modesty, should have anything to do with the stage.

"I am thinking that you will be asking me as you did of the viaduct—may not the skill of man be taken as one of God's works?" he said, thoughtfully. "And I'm fain to confess that I have ever considered theatres as the highway to hell, and actors as so many servants of the devil. May God forgive me if I have failed in charity and dealt out harsh judgment to them."

So they fell into talk together, and Ralph told of the landlady who had shut the door in his face, and assumed that he was no Christian. He told of some of the ar-

rangements at the two theatres in London with which he was acquainted. He told more than one story which he had heard from Myra Kay of the good that Hugh Macneillie had done. And the old minister listened and pondered these strange sayings in his heart, looking all the time with a sort of wistfulness at the fresh, hopeful face opposite him—a face which somehow haunted him long after Ralph had left the Manse.

"He had been through a hard apprenticeship, and I doubt he had little enough in his pockets," reflected the old man as he paced the bare, little parlour.

"He'd been defrauded of his pay and had looked on the evil as well as on the good, but still he pleaded like a born advocate for his calling—his art; and spite of his troubles there was a blithe look in his face which sore perplexes me."

He walked to and fro many times, finally he took a Bible from the shelf and turned over the pages until he came to the words he sought. They were these: "The joy of the Lord is your strength."

"It was *that* his look kept bringing before me," he said to himself, and he sighed because he knew that there was too little of the element of joy in his life, and that he plodded on from day to day, considering religion a privilege and a duty, but somehow missing the gladness which might have been his. Ralph meanwhile, much refreshed by the rest and food and by his host's kindly words, tramped on contentedly enough through the wild, desolate country which led to Grantown. The sun was just setting as he reached the village; workmen were making their way homeward, some children with little, dusty, bare feet were playing battledore and shuttlecock in the road, the ruddy light on their hair looked like burnished copper.

"Come awa bairns, it's time ye were a' in bed," called a comely mother standing in the open doorway of one of the houses.

"Just a wee whilie," pleaded the children.

"Ah!" she replied, yielding under protest, "You're an awfu' care to me!"

But there was love and pride in her eyes nevertheless, as she watched their play.

Ralph sighed a little as he tramped on. He was now both hungry and tired, and began to consider his plans; it was quite clear that he could not afford the price of a bed, and it was still too light to venture upon such shelter as might be found in barns or under hedges. He turned into a baker's shop, secured a good-sized stale loaf, and then for want of anything better to do, found his way to the railway station where he amused himself by looking out trains which he had no money to travel by, after which, having had the good fortune to find a *Glasgow Herald* in the waiting-room, left behind by some traveller, he read until it was quite dusk. The quiet little place roused into a sort of activity about a quarter past eight when two trains arrived, one from Perth, the other from Elgin, and Ralph sauntered on to the platform with a faint hope that he might see some face that he knew—he could almost in his loneliness have welcomed the Skoots! But very few passengers alighted, and directly they had been seen off the premises the porters began to lock up for the night—no more trains were expected.

"After all," reflected Ralph, as he left the village behind him, and tramped along the highroad in the gathering gloom, "if I had gone out to the colonies I should think nothing of camping out for a night. There's no more disgrace in it here than there. And luckily there's no law, as there is in England, against sleeping under a hedge, I can't be had up as a vagrant in Scotland. Now, if only I had not been forced to sell Macneillie's knife it would have been handy enough for cutting this loaf which must certainly have come out of the Ark."

He wrenched off the top with difficulty and laughed to himself as he thought how horrified Lady Mactavish would be, could she see him now in the shabbiest of clothes, tramping a dusty road and munching stale bread as he went.

"Most certainly I should have Sir Matthew's charitable dole of ten pounds thrust into my hand," he said, with an exulting sense that come what would, he would never apply for that relief. "Rather than go to him for help, I would willingly turn into that Refuge for destitute men at Edinburgh, which we saw as we walked down the Canongate." He shuddered a little as the recollection came to him of the sort of man he had seen seeking shelter there. At any rate out of doors he would have fresh air and no companions in misery.

He must have walked nearly five miles from the village, before he saw in the faint starlight a large farmhouse with many outbuildings. "This is the place for me," he thought, making his way into the yard: but he had yet to learn the difficulties before him. The doors of a hopeful-looking barn were securely fastened, and, as he crossed the yard to some other outbuildings, up sprang a huge dog from his kennel, with angry growls and fierce barks. He walked up to the mastiff, with swift, light steps, patted its head, fondled its ears, and explained to it the situation. The dog was mollified, understood that the intruder's intentions were honourable, and even licked his hand, which Ralph took very kindly.

Looking round searchingly, he made out, at last, a sort of open shed, near the stables, and moving across to this, had the good fortune to discover a cart with trusses of hay in it.

"This will exactly suit me, my friend," he said, with a farewell pat to the dog. "May you sleep as comfortably in that lordly kennel of yours!" And, so saying,

he climbed up into the cart, stowed the remains of his loaf in a safe place, and with deft hands had soon made himself as warm a bed as could be desired, out of the hay.

He slept soundly, being healthily tired with his long walk—so soundly, indeed, that though cocks and hens and ducks and turkeys, all began, at an early hour, to blend their voices in a countrified, but scarcely musical chorus, he heard nothing. In his dream, Miss Brompton, in a waterproof, was thumping out "Scots wha hae," between the acts; and presently, when certain strange rumblings slightly disturbed him, he dreamed that it was the thunder in the first scene of "Macbeth," finally waking himself up by laughing at the comical sight presented by Mrs. Skoot as she vainly tried to drag him out of his witch's cloak that he might appear as *Malcolm*. Her angry, impatient face convulsed him with mirth, and it was with no small bewilderment that he awoke to find himself struggling out of a heap of hay, while from above, the amazed face of a red-whiskered man gazed down upon him. The rustic's round, light-grey eyes had a scared look, and Ralph suddenly remembered where he was, and began to apologise and explain. The cart no longer stood in the shed, but had rumbled out into the highroad, and the driver had evidently no intention of proceeding, while his uncanny visitant still remained among the hay.

"Gude preserve us!" he exclaimed, "I was thinkin' the cart was bewitched when I harkened to yon fearsome laughter."

Ralph shook off the hay and leapt lightly into the road; his agility and grace seemed to strike still deeper awe into the heart of the countryman, who stared like one fascinated.

"A doot you hef brought luck with you to the farm, sir," he said, looking down into the comely face and

laughing eyes of his astonishing guest. "And there would hef ben a bowl o' milk set for you had you bin expeckit. But it will be a fery long time since the Brownies hef veesited us, and there's bin nae luck aboot the farm for mony a year."

"Great Scott! the man thinks I'm a 'Robin Goodfellow' or a warlock!" thought Ralph, highly amused. "And he's far too much afraid of me to offer me a ride in his cart."

"I'm just a wayfaring man," he tried to explain. "Very grateful for the shelter of your hay-cart on a cold night."

"Oh, ay," said the carter, still evidently holding to his own opinion. "And it is fery glad we are to be seein' you, sir. And a ken weel that it's na for human bein's to come into our place at night. Lassie wad bark till ilka soul in the hoose was wakened, and she will be flying at the thrapple o' ony mortal man. But dogs hef aye descreemination to tell the Brownies when they see them. I will be wishin' you gude day, sir."

And so saying, he drove off hastily, leaving Ralph to trudge along in solitude, until catching sight of a stream at a little distance from the road, he reflected that the best things in life were to be had free of charge, and that a morning bath would freshen him for the day.

As for the driver he chanced to look back from a distance, and catching sight of his uncanny visitor just as he took a header into the water, was for ever confirmed in his opinion that he had seen and spoken with a Brownie.

The second day's walk proved even more enjoyable than the first had done, except that there was no kindly old minister to provide a midday meal. But the sense of freedom, the bracing air, and the loveliness of the road beside the river Spey, with glimpses every now and then of the Cairn Gorm range, were things to be remembered through a lifetime. With Aviemore specially, he was

delighted. He began to weave plans for the future, and to dream of wandering with Evereld among those exquisite hills with their craggy rocks cropping out here and there from between dark pines and delicately fresh birches, while beyond there stretched great pine woods, and mountains whose summits were still white with snow. Kingussie furnished him with bread and with a somewhat draughty sleeping apartment in the ruined castle which goes by the name of the Ruthven Barracks; but the night air was keen, and many a time he longed for the warmth and comfort of the hay-cart. There was something dreary, too, in the desolate shell of the old residence of the Comyns, and he awoke with a feeling of depression which was curiously foreign to him. The morning was cloudy, and the waters of the Spey felt icy cold as he plunged into them; however, the walk through Glen Tromie which the old minister had specially recommended to him soon made him warm enough, and the wild beauty of Loch Seilich, and its surrounding precipices fully justified the praises which his guide had bestowed on them. He rested for some little while by the loch, ate his last crust, and counted over, as a miser counts his gold, the three pence which must somehow carry him to Glasgow.

"I must certainly eat less," he reflected, ruefully, having only dared the previous night to buy a pennyworth of bread. "The worst of it is this mountain air makes one so confoundedly hungry. I shall soon be reduced to eating birds' eggs, or to singing in front of village alehouses in the hope of earning money."

His reverie was interrupted by the falling of some heavy drops of rain; he set out once more on his walk seeing plainly enough from the threatening sky that a storm was at hand. It came indeed with a speed which surprised him. Clouds, which blotted out the landscape, hemmed him in; the rising wind roared through the wilds

of Gaick, and the rain came down in sheets, blinding and drenching him, for no mackintosh yet invented could have stood the pitiless deluge which showed no sign of abating, but rather increased in violence. Worst of all, he missed his path so that there was not even the comfort of knowing that every step was bringing him nearer his destination. On the contrary, he began to fear that he had altogether lost himself.

The further he went the more hopeless he grew; he was wet to the skin, every bone in his body ached, and no sign of a track was to be found. It seemed to him that he was the only living creature in this vast solitude, and his delight was unbounded when at length, through the driving rain and mist, he caught sight of a figure approaching him. A collie sprang forward and barked, and was called back by its master, a tall, manly figure with a crook in his hand, and under his arm an ugly little black lamb. He seemed not unlike a picture of the Good Shepherd, and Ralph instantly felt confidence in the clear, kindly eyes which looked out at him in a friendly fashion from beneath the Scotch bonnet; there was something noble and winning in this dark-bearded Highlander.

"Can you put me into the track for Dalnacardoch?" asked Ralph, as he returned the shepherd's greeting. "I have lost my way in the mist."

CHAPTER XV

"Through ways unlooked for, and through many lands,
Far from the rich folds built with human hands,
The gracious footprints of His love I trace."

LOWELL.

ANGUS LINKLATER was in no danger of mistaking the traveller for a Brownie; one of his long, keen glances told him much of the truth about Ralph, for he had the rare gift of insight and his kindly heart warmed to the tired wayfarer.

He at once protested that it was out of the question to go on in such weather to Dalnacardoch, and invited Ralph to take shelter in his cottage, which was but a few minutes' walk.

Ralph hesitated for a moment. The rain streamed down his face and neck, his boots felt like a couple of reservoirs, and the thought of shelter was very tempting.

"I will tell you just how it is with me," he said; "I have but a few pence left and must reach Stirling before I have a chance of getting my letters and further supplies. I think I must press on, for there is no time to be lost."

"Put ony thought o' troublin' us oot o' your head, sir," said Angus, instantly reading his companion's thoughts, and beginning to walk on beside him. "The hame is just a but and a ben, and you're kindly welcome to a' that we can gie you in the way o' food and shelter for the night."

"You are very good," said Ralph. "If you can conveniently take me in I shall be thankful. But don't be putting yourselves out for me. When I tell you that I slept last night in the ruins of the old castle at Kingussie, and in a hay-cart near Grantown the night before, you will see that to be under a roof at all will be a luxury to me."

He laughed. The shepherd gave him another of those sympathetic, discerning looks.

"You have had trouble I see," he said. "But I'm thinkin' that you're meetin' it in the right way."

"Oh," said Ralph lightly, "I'm just an actor out of work. For several weeks we have had plenty to do and no money; now we have neither money nor work, and I am hoping to get into another company."

"It's no right that ony man should work without wages," said Angus; "it's clean against Scripture. But just for a wee while I'm thinkin' that it's maybe no sic an ill thing for us to learn that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance o' the things which he possesseth."

"Well, it's not hard to agree to that now that I'm close to your house," said Ralph, "but I'll confess to you that I was beginning to despair before I met you."

"Ay," said Angus, a smile crossing his face, "Ilka ane o' us is apt to be like this stray lamb that was tryin' to mak' its way hame and was scairt almost to death with encounterin' deefficulties. It might have hed the sense to know that as the sayin' goes, 'Where twa are seekin' they're sure to find.'"

"Is that one of your Scottish proverbs?" said Ralph, struck by the beauty of the thought.

"Ay, it is, sir, and it often comes to my mind when I'm after the sheep. Ye mauna despair though you're oot o' wark. We are maist o' us ready to say 'The Lord's my shepherd,' but at the first glint o' trouble we change the psalm and say 'but I'm terrible feart that I'll come to want.'"

There was a sort of dry humour in his manner of saying these last words, and Ralph smiled.

"I see you are a thought-reader," he said, "as well as a thinker."

"Oh, as for that," said the shepherd, "those that spend their lives amang the mountains have aye mickle time for thinkin'. It's a gran' preevilege to be set to mind the sheep."

They were now within sight of the cottage and Angus Linklater led the way through a little garden; at the sound of their footsteps his wife opened the door, it seemed almost as though she were expecting her husband to bring some one back with him, but after one glance at the visitor her eagerness died away; she was a grave woman with dark hair parted plainly beneath her white mutch, and with a certain sadness in her eyes and in her voice. Her welcome was, however, as hearty as the shepherd's and before long she had furnished Ralph with her husband's Sunday garments and was busily preparing tea. When the tired traveller emerged again from the back room in dry clothes, he thought nothing had ever looked more comfortable than that homely little kitchen with its fire of logs, its old grandfather clock, and its quaint, corner cupboard, black with age. Some lines of Stevenson's came to his mind as Mrs. Linklater made room for him by the hearth.

> "Noo is the soopit ingle sweet,
> An' liltin' kettle."

Delicious too was the tea and the oatcake after his monotonous bread and water diet. Angus was still out attending to the lamb he had brought home, and Ralph wondered whether the shepherd and his wife lived alone in this quiet place. Among the few books on the shelf, he noticed, however, sundry modern adventuring books which had been the delight of his childhood. "I see you

have some children," he said, finding his hostess not nearly so talkative as the shepherd had been.

"We hae a son," she replied, her eyes filling with tears, and crossing the room she took down "The Dog Crusoe" and showed him the inscription on the flyleaf.

It was a prize for good conduct awarded to Dugald Linklater. Ralph instantly felt that he had touched on a sore subject but whether the son were dead or a source of trouble to the mother he could not guess. The book was still in his hand when Angus returned.

"Ah," he said, with a sigh, "you're lookin' at puir Dugald's prizes. We've lost him, sir. But he'll come hame yet. I'm no dootin' that. He'll come hame."

Little by little Ralph gathered the facts of the case. It seemed that Dugald had been a clever and promising lad, that Lord Ederline having a fancy for him had taken him as his valet, and for a time all had gone well. But London life had proved too full of temptation for the young Scotsman, the betting mania had seized him, and had swiftly dragged him down, until ruined and disgraced he had disappeared into those hidden depths which are sought by the failures of all classes. It was now three years since anything had been heard of him, but the father and mother still lived in the belief that he would return, and Ralph understood now the expectant look which he had noticed in the sad face of his hostess as he walked up the garden path with her husband.

The absent son seemed to dominate their thoughts and it was with something almost like envy that Ralph, in his singularly desolate life, thought of this apparent waste of love. Was it pride, or shame or sheer wickedness that kept Dugald away from such a home, he wondered?

The Linklaters kept very early hours, and after "taking the Book" and "composing their minds to worship," they bade their guest good-night. A bed had

been extemporised for him on a comfortable old settle where, with the shepherd's plaid to keep him warm, he thought himself in luxurious quarters. But sleep would not come to him at that hour in the evening and he lay for a long time watching the ruddy glow from the dying fire on the hearth and musing over many things. He was glad that the storm had overtaken him and that he had found shelter in this Highland cottage, for in its atmosphere there was something curiously peaceful and homelike. It was many, many years since he had felt so much at one with any household—almost it seemed to him like a return to his old home. For, perhaps, nothing has more effect on a sensitive, receptive mind than moral atmosphere; while those sweet, subtle associations, which are the aftermath of a happy childhood, are more readily awakened by this native air of the soul than by things which can be actually seen.

He took leave the next morning with a sense that these people had become his friends, and that somehow they would meet again. The shepherd would fain have helped him on his way, but he knew better than to offer what his guest would little like to receive; nor did he, of course, realise how very few were the pence still remaining to him. They gave him the best breakfast the house would furnish, and Mrs. Linklater insisted on wrapping up a shepherd's pasty, which she said would make a luncheon for him; then, with kindly cordiality, they bade him farewell, begging him to let them know how he prospered.

Cheered by their friendliness, Ralph walked in very good spirits through the Gaick Forest to Dalnacardoch, and thence, after a brief rest, made his way southward to Tummel Bridge. The air felt fresh after the storm and walking was delightful, but he found no friendly shepherd's cottage to shelter him, and passed a very cold and comfortless night under the shelter of a rick, which

proved distinctly uncomfortable as sleeping quarters. Twice he was roused by mice running over his face, and in the dead of night a groan and the falling of some heavy object at his very feet made him start up. It proved to be a drunken and very dirty tramp, whose neighbourhood was highly undesirable, and Ralph shifted his quarters to the other side of the rick where the keen, north-east wind was far from pleasant. He woke again in the grey dawn, feeling stiff and miserable. The tramp still retained the leeward side of the rick, so there was nothing for it but to resume his journey, and gradually the morning mist cleared and the sun rose, revealing the fine outline of Schiehallion and chasing away the chill discomfort of the night. Indeed, by the time Ralph had reached the village of Fortingall, he was both hot and sleepy, and finding the kirkyard deserted, he lay down on a sunny patch of grass, with his head resting on one of the stone ledges that flanked the railings round the famous yew tree of three thousand years old. How long he slept he could not tell, but he awoke at length to the consciousness of hunger. Having eaten all the bread he had saved from the previous night, he wandered towards the kirk, and hearing the sound of a voice through the open windows, realised for the first time that it was Sunday. The preacher was giving out the One hundred and twenty-first psalm, and pausing to listen, he heard, to the familiar tune of "French," the following quaint metrical version.

"I to the hills will lift mine eyes,
From whence doth come my aid?
My safety cometh from the Lord,
Who heav'n and earth hath made.
Thy foot he'll not let slide nor will
He slumber that thee keeps.
Behold He that keeps Israel
He slumbers not nor sleeps.

"The Lord thee keeps, the Lord thy shade
On thy right hand doth stay;
The moon by night thee shall not smite,
Nor yet the sun by day.
The Lord shall keep thy soul; he shall
Preserve thee from all ill.
Henceforth thy going out and in
God keep for ever will."

As the last words were sung, Ralph made his way to the door and entered the little building, just as the congregation stood up to pray. He felt, as he had done in the shepherd's cottage, that sense of fellowship which was what he needed in his loneliness; nor could the length of the sermon, with its bewildering array of heads, spoil for him that May morning, and the strengthening influence of the calm worship hour, which seemed to him more spiritual, more grand in its simplicity, than elaborately ornate and showy ceremonials.

He went on his way refreshed, and, taking the road to Fearnan, soon reached the shores of Loch Tay. Away in the distance Ben Lawers rose rugged and stern against the pale blue of the sky, and the walk left nothing to be wished in the way of beauty. The only drawback was the growing sense of fatigue that come over him. He wondered that a walk of eighteen miles could so exhaust him. It was true he had been out of training when he started from Forres, and had walked many miles each day upon short rations, but he was dismayed to find that his powers of endurance were not greater.

It was evening by the time he reached the Bridge of Lochay, and learnt that he was within a mile of Killin. Feeling now tired out, he resolved to go no further; moreover, he had learnt from experience that it was better to sleep at a little distance from towns or villages. He paused to talk to an old labouring man who was leaning over the bridge. To the left there was a lovely

little wood closely shutting in the river; to the right, the stream wound its way through green hayfields, and on through the wild beauty of Glen Lochay to the distant hills which were bathed now in a mellow, sunset light. Learning from his companion that he could get food close at hand, Ralph made his way to the little white old-fashioned inn just beyond the bridge. Its walls were covered with creepers, its garden gay with flowers, and in the porch were two comfortable chairs. The landlady seemed a little surprised at his request for two penny worth of bread: she would have been yet more surprised had she known that he gave her his very last coins in payment; for the rest, she answered his questions about Killin, and the distance from thence to Callander, and let him rest as long as he liked in the porch, bidding him a friendly good-night when at dusk he once more resumed his journey. Evidently the inn closed early on the Sabbath, for Ralph heard the door shut and bolted behind him.

He paused, and looked round in search of shelter. Not far off, the ground sloped steeply up, and fir-trees were planted about it. Climbing over the low stone wall, he made his way towards a fallen tree, the wide-spreading roots of which pointed darkly up against the twilight sky. It lay just as it had fallen in a wintry gale, its rough bark was veiled here and there by clumps of brake fern, and the turf still grew between the roots as it had grown when the tree was torn out of the earth by the storm. It proved a good shelter from the cold night wind, and Ralph crept closely down beneath it, and soon slept. His sleep, however, was disturbed by horrible dreams, and when in the early morning he awoke unrefreshed and with aching head, he felt no inclination to stay longer in his lair. Stretching his stiff limbs, he stood for a minute looking at the wonderful view before him. Beyond the river there lay a grand panorama of

mountains; here and there were large plantations of fir, then came wild, bare tracks of heather, black and cheerless now without its bloom, but relieved at intervals by grey boulders and patches of grass, while little, white cottages were dotted, like rare pearls, about the landscape.

A good swim in the river revived him, after which he went on to Killin, and, seeing little chance of selling his mackintosh there, hoped for better luck that night at Callander; and learning that there was a short cut to Glen Ogle, left the road and struck across the mountainside, gaining, as he walked, fine views of Ben Vorlich. Toiling up in the sun proved warm work, however, and by the time he reached the gloomy, narrow glen he was thankful to wait and rest. He wondered whether it was the effect of the place or merely his own fault that such deadly depression began to creep over him. The stern, purple mountains seemed to frown on him, the tiny stream down below in the middle of the glen looked miserably insufficient for its wide, rocky bed, and the lingering mists of early morning still hung about in weird wreaths. This was the sixth day on which he had been a vagabond, and he began to wonder whether he should ever reach Glasgow. With an effort he shook off for a time the sense of impending evil, and forced himself to eat the remains of the loaf he had bought on the previous night.

"Now," he thought to himself, as once more he tramped on, "I am bound, whatever happens, to reach Callander this evening. I must walk or starve; that will be a good sort of goad."

The road was mostly down hill, and he made a brave start, passed Loch Earn, which lay far below in the valley, looking exquisitely lovely in the May sunshine, and then toiled up again towards Strathyre, pausing only to ask for some water at a grey, slate-roofed farm on the

outskirts of the village. Here he learned the comforting fact that it was but "eight miles and a bittock" to Callander, and went on in better spirits. Away to the right he caught beautiful glimpses of the Braes of Balquhidder, and at last, to his relief, came down to the shores of Loch Lubnaig.

But the loch was nearly five miles long, and before he had gone half its length such intolerable pain and weariness overpowered him that he could hardly drag one foot after another. He was forced to rest for a while; then once more blindly staggered on, wondering what was going to happen to him and counting the milestones with the eagerness of despair. At length the loch was passed, and the two railway bridges. He knew that he must be in the Pass of Leny, and as he toiled up the hill could hear the rushing sound of the river among the trees to the right. Then came the moment when he could do no more, but sank down half-fainting by the roadside, his head resting on a rough seat which had been placed against the wall. How long he lay there he could not tell, but he was roused by the sound of footsteps close at hand. Half opening his eyes he caught sight of two hard-featured men, who glanced at him critically and shrugged their shoulders.

"Drunk," he heard one of them say, "and as early in the afternoon as this!"

The words rankled in poor Ralph's mind.

"If I had not tried to be honest it would never have come to this," he reflected. "Because my clothes are shabby and my boots in holes they judge me. Well, it's what the poor always have to put up with!"

He dragged himself to his feet, and, noticing for the first time some steps in the wall and a path leading down to the river, thought he would hide his misery and escape from further comments. He was parched with thirst, too, but to reach the water proved hopeless. Though the

river was swollen with the recent storm, it went surging and foaming below him among the rocks in a way which made him feel sick and giddy. He just staggered on by the narrow, rocky track and the wooden gallery till he reached the smoother path beyond, which led into a little wood, and here once more his powers deserted him, and he again lost consciousness.

When he came to himself he was lying uneasily across the path, his head on the mossy bank and his feet hanging perilously over the water. It just crossed his mind that he might easily enough have lost his life had he fallen in the opposite direction, and he wondered dreamily whether it would not have simplified matters, yet, wretched as he was, he felt somehow glad to be alive. Away in the distance he could see Ben Ledi rising in its tranquil beauty beyond the foaming river. There was a rocky islet, too, in the centre of the flood, with a tall, stately fir-tree growing upon it, the dark foliage strongly contrasting with the white foam and the vivid green of the trees on the further bank. To his fancy, the rushing river seemed to ring out the tune of

"I to the hills will lift mine eyes,"

as he had heard it sung on the previous day at Fortingall Kirk.

All sorts of half-misty memories thronged his fevered brain. He thought he was walking again with Angus Linklater as he carried the ugly little black lamb; or he was out boating with his father; or he was at rehearsal, and Mrs. Skoot was wrathfully haranguing him. Through all these feverish fancies, there remained the ever-present consciousness of physical misery, and the rankling recollection of the words he had heard from the two men who had passed him on the road. Presently, yet another fancy took possession of him. He

was sitting with Evereld in a theatre, and could distinctly hear the actual words of Shylock's part:

"What, what, what? ill luck, ill luck?"
"I thank God, I thank God. Is't true, is't true?"
"I thank thee good Tubal; good news! good news! ha, ha, where? In Genoa?"

The voice was certainly not Washington's. He was puzzled.

"Thou stickest a dagger in me," it resumed, then suddenly broke off, and in the pause that followed he heard steps approaching. He opened his eyes, but saw only the familiar view of Ben Ledi and the foaming river. He had no notion that just behind him stood a tall, striking figure, and that some one was keenly studying him, not with the critical harshness of the passers-by in the road, but with the reverent sympathetic manner of the artist.

CHAPTER XVI

"Every man's task is his life-preserver. The conviction that his work is dear to God and cannot be spared, defends him."—EMERSON.

"CAN I do anything for you?" asked a mellow, penetrating voice.

Ralph shifted his position a little, and looking round, saw a man bending over him with a curiously attractive face, chestnut-brown hair fast turning white, large, well-shaped, blue-grey eyes, and that mobile type of mouth which specially belongs to the actor. He had a strange impression of having lived through this scene before, and in a moment there flashed back into his mind a recollection of his first day at Sir Matthew's house, of his adventure in the park, and of how Macneillie had pulled him out of the water. "Oh, is it you?" he cried, with a relief that could hardly have been greater had he met an old friend.

Macneillie in vain racked his memory: he could not in the least recall the face. However, he was not going to betray this. "Glad I came across you," he said. "I often come down here by the river to study a part, this path is little frequented till the tourist season begins. Let me see, where did we last meet?"

"You will hardly remember it," said Ralph; "it was at Richmond. I was quite a small boy and ran up to thank you for having pulled me out of the water a few

weeks before in St. James' Park. You gave me your knife."

A look of keen and sudden interest flashed over Macneillie's face.

"Of course!" he exclaimed; "I remember it all perfectly. I'm very glad to have come across you again. What is the matter now? You look very ill. Are you taking a walking tour?"

Ralph smiled. "I set out from Forres last Wednesday morning with sixpence in my pocket," he said. "It has been a roughish time."

"I should think so, indeed," said Macneillie, glancing from the slightly-built figure to the thin, finely-shaped hands, and realising in a moment how little fitted this lad was to endure hardships. "From Forres you say? What was it I was hearing a day or two ago about Forres? Oh, to be sure, Skoot's Company came to grief there."

"Yes, I was in the company," said Ralph. "Skoot left us in the lurch, and it was a sort of *sauve qui peut.*"

"So you belong to the profession," said Macneillie. "That gives you another claim upon me. Perhaps you are the very Mr. Denmead that Miss Kay mentioned in her letter."

"Yes, I am Ralph Denmead. Miss Kay promised she would inquire if you had any opening for me."

"We'll see about that, but in the meantime, if I'm not much mistaken, the influenza fiend means to work his will on you. By the look of you I should say that you were in a high fever."

"I don't know what is the matter with me," said Ralph, miserably. "I suppose I fainted just now in the road. I know that a priest and a levite looked at me, said I was drunk, and passed by on the other side."

"Trust them to leap to the worst conclusions," said Macneillie. "It's the way of the world. But come, I must somehow contrive to get you to my house."

Ill and exhausted, Ralph for the life of him could not keep the tears out of his eyes.

"You are very kind," he said, brokenly; "but I didn't mean to thrust the part of Good Samaritan on to you. I'm not fit to come to a decent house."

He looked down at his travel-stained clothes, and at the holes in his boots.

"Did you mean to lie here all night?" said Macneillie.

"No, I meant to get on as far as Callander and to pawn this mackintosh. I am better. I'll push on now. Perhaps there may be a hospital."

"Well, there isn't, as it happens," said Macneillie, watching him attentively as he struggled to his feet; "and it's two miles to Callander, and if you think I'm going to allow you to walk as far as that you're much mistaken. I'm a very indifferent Good Samaritan, having no beast to set you on, but if you'll try to come with me to the little village of Kilmahog which is not far off we can rest at a cottage I know of, have a cup of tea, and take the coach from the Trossachs which will pass there in about an hour. As for your scruples in coming home with me, you must just make away with them. My mother has often received me in quite as bad a plight years ago when I was struggling to get my foot on the ladder. We most of us have to go through it unless we happen to belong to an old professional family."

As he talked he had slipped his arm within Ralph's, and was guiding him up the narrow path, which, after a steep climb landed them once more in the road. Without waiting for much response he went on, telling story after story of his own early days as an actor, and at length the tiny village of Kilmahog came into sight, and they paused before a little, low white cottage with a picturesque porch and tiny garden. The mistress of the house seemed delighted to see her visitor, and responded most hospitably to his request for a cup of tea while

they waited for the coach. She took them into a parlour hung round with sacred pictures, and possessing a most curious bed made on a sort of shelf in a curtained recess. Ralph looked longingly at it as he sank into a chair, but Macneillie shook his head.

"Yes, I see you want to be Mrs. Murdoch's patient, but those 'congealed beds,' as I always call them, are not well-suited to a fever."

"And when did ye come hame, sir," inquired the landlady, returning with the tea tray; "and hoo are ye likin' your braw new hoose?"

"I came home at the end of last week," he replied; "and as for the house it's to my mother's liking and that's all I care for. We hear the trains a trifle too plainly for my taste, but she likes that, says, you know, that they are a sort of link with me when I'm away."

"Ah, but Mrs. Macneillie she's main prood o' her beautiful rooms, but I'm thinkin' it's mair because it's her son that's made them a' for her. She was in Kilmahog last month settlin' the account for the milk, and she said to me that if a' mithers were blessed with such a son as hers there'd be a hantle less sorrow in the warld. Those were her verra words, sir."

Macneillie laughed. "My mother was always prejudiced in my favour," he said. "It's the one subject you can't trust her upon."

The good woman bustled off to make the tea, and the actor turned again to Ralph.

"My mother is the best nurse in the world: she will soon have you well again."

"Why not let me stay here?" said Ralph. "It would give you less trouble. I shall only spoil your holiday, and perhaps bring the infection into your house."

"Oh, we have most of us been down with this plague already," said Macneillie, cheerfully. "I know you covet that antique bed, but we must have you in a more airy

room than this. Perhaps it will make you hesitate less if I tell you in strict confidence that the new house would never have been built at all if it had not been for you." Then, seeing the bewilderment of his companion's expression, "I'll tell you just how it was some day, it's too long a story now, for I hear the tea-things coming."

Ralph, utterly at a loss to see how Macneillie could be under any sort of obligation to him, was obliged to leave the riddle unsolved for the present. The tea revived him, and when the coach came into sight he almost thought he could have walked that last mile. A dreamy sense of relief began to steal over him as they drove on beside the river between the wooded hills and through the pretty environs of Callander, until at last they reached the main street itself, and turning sharply to the left began to climb a steep road. Here, nestling cosily under Callander crag, with fresh green woods behind it, stood the comfortable, squarely built stone house that the actor had planned for his mother. The coach paused at the iron gate, for it was out of the question that they should drive up the steep approach to the front door; indeed, it was not without difficulty that Ralph dragged himself up the pebbly incline; he was panting for breath by the time they reached the house, and it was with some anxiety that he looked up at the white-capped old lady who stood to greet them in the porch.

"Mother," said Macneillie, "this is my friend, Mr. Denmead. He has walked all the way from Forres, and is quite fagged out." The keen, shrewd eyes of the Scotchwoman had perceived from a distance the sorry plight of the visitor, and she looked now not at his deplorable boots and shabby coat, but at the honest, dark eyes lifted to hers; she saw directly that they were full of dumb suffering.

"I am glad to see any friend of my son's," she said, and there was something curiously comforting in the

homely sound of the Scottish accent, but when she had shaken hands with her guest an almost motherly tenderness stole into her voice. She begged him to come in and rest, made minute inquiries as to the hour when the fever attacked him, and having left him installed on a sofa in the dining-room, drew her son into the hall. "Hugh," she said, "the poor laddie is very ill. I will go and make a room ready for him, and you had better be fetching the doctor."

"I will by-and-bye, but first let us get him settled. Put him into my room, it's the most airy. I'll tell you who he is, mother." The two had gone upstairs as they were speaking, and Macneillie closed the door of his room behind them, and began helping in a deft, sailor-like way to strip the sheets off his bed. "He is the boy I told you about years ago, who saved me from making an end of myself on Christine's wedding day." At the name, a sort of shudder of distaste passed through Mrs. Macneillie; it was a name very rarely mentioned by either of them, and the mother fondly hoped that at last her son had banished from his mind all memory of that romance of his youth. But, dearly as they loved each other, there was a good deal of reserve between them, and she could not tell how it was with him. After his absence in America, he had come back looking much older, but apparently in good health and spirits, and more than ever engrossed by his work. Little as she liked his profession, for she was full of old-fashioned prejudice and clung to all her old traditions, she nevertheless often blessed it in her heart for she saw that he lived for it, and, spite of herself, could not help taking some interest in his efforts to raise the drama, to give only such plays as were worth acting, and to manage his company in the best possible way. Still it was undoubtedly the grief of her life that her son had chosen the stage instead of the ministry, and he was quite aware of it, and was obliged to

get on without her entire sympathy. She was unable to see that he was really doing quite as good work as any minister in the land, nor did she understand that an actor in refusing to follow his clear vocation, would be as blameworthy as a divine who put his hand to the plough, and then looked back. She did not speak a word now until they had the clean sheets spread and all things ready for the invalid. Then she drew her son's face down and kissed it.

"I shall love to wait on him, Hugh, now that you have told me that."

"You'll like it for his own sake too," said Macneillie. "It takes a fellow of good mettle to tramp more than a hundred miles on six-pennyworth of bread, and wear the look he wore when I found him. Oddly enough, too, I learnt something about him from Miss Kay's letter on Saturday; he belonged to that company that failed, and she told me that she much feared he had spent almost all the money he had left, on sending back to London a forlorn little child-actress who had been deserted by the manager's wife."

"A child? Poor wee thing! There are many perils and dangers in your profession, Hugh, you can't deny that."

"Yes there are," he said, "but I am not sure that life in society, or in other professions, or in shops and factories, isn't even more risky. As for this little Ivy Grant, you may be quite happy about her; he had the good sense to send her to trustworthy friends."

No more was said, for it was time to fetch the invalid and to send for the doctor. But later on, Mrs. Macneillie opened her heart to her son.

"It's all very well, Hugh," she said, "to think that everything is made right by the little girl being in good hands for the time; but you mark my words, it will be the same story over again as your own. This poor lad will

be shielding and helping Ivy Grant, and when she has other admirers, why she'll throw him off like an old glove. It will be your own story over again, Hugh."

"I hope not," said Macneillie. "Let us believe he would have done as much for any distressed damsel. He is a generous fellow, and every inch a gentleman; why must we assume that he has fallen in love with the lassie?"

"Didn't I find him sobbing his heart out the moment he was left to himself?" said Mrs. Macneillie.

But at this her son would do nothing but laugh. "My dear mother," he said, "That is just the sure and certain sign that he has the influenza, but as to that far worse malady no sign whatever."

CHAPTER XVII

"So, from the pinched soil of a churlish fate,
True hearts compel the sap of sturdier growth,
And between earth and heaven stand simply great,
That these shall seem but their attendants both."

LOWELL.

FOR some days Ralph gave his new friends a good deal of anxiety; no doubt the worry and the underfeeding of the past nine months had told upon him, and culminating in this week of hardship and exposure had left him very ill-fitted to resist the modern plague which was scourging the country. By the time he had turned the corner and was able to spend part of each day in the adjoining room, he had wound himself very closely about the hearts both of the mother and the son. For there was something in his blithe cheerfulness which was very winning and which not even the depression that always accompanies influenza could affect for very long, any more than Sir Matthew Mactavish's treatment could really embitter his nature, though it occasionally made him speak a few cynical words.

Macneillie had by this time heard the story of his life, and had set his mind at rest by offering to have him in his company at the beginning of August. He wrote, moreover, to a friend of his, the manager of one of the Edinburgh theatres, and tried to obtain a temporary engagement for him, to fill up the summer months. To this there was for some days no response, and Ralph, who

was beginning to chafe at the thought of his penniless condition, grew depressed, and with the sensitiveness of a convalescent feared that he was a burden to his kindly host. Macneillie was quick to discern what was passing in his mind.

"Pining for that hospital you were so anxious to find at Callander?" he said one afternoon when he had found Ralph unusually depressed.

The invalid smiled.

"Not exactly. But I'm wishing I needn't spoil your holiday."

"Have you forgotten what I told you as we waited for the coach that day at Kilmahog?" said Macneillie, bracing himself up as though for some effort. "This house would never have been built if it had not been for you. I saw you hardly took in what I was saying, but it's as true as that you and I sit here together smoking. I will try to tell you the whole story."

"Years ago, when I was a young fellow playing juvenile lead in Castor's travelling company, there joined us a little, forlorn girl of sixteen, fresh from school, and utterly innocent. She was very unhappy, and I, naturally enough, fell into the sort of position that you fell into with Ivy Grant. She badly wanted a protector, and I did what I could for her. Well, little by little, this sort of friendship drifted into love, and though our engagement was not made public and was never recognised by her parents, they did not exactly forbid it or in any way hinder our intercourse, being shrewd enough, I suppose, to see that had they done so, their daughter would only have become more resolute and determined. Things drifted on like this for ten years. For five of these years we were acting in the same theatre in London, and I was fairly satisfied to wait, and never once doubted her. But there came a time when she felt hampered in her profession for want of money, and just then came an offer of

marriage from a man who, though old enough to be her father, was immensely rich. He had a title moreover, and as far as I know, he was not a bad fellow—had he not been of decent repute, I am sure she would not have married him. Still I had seen enough of him to know that they had not a taste in common, and the misery of it all unhinged me. She was to be married at the close of the season, and every night—twice on Saturdays—we had to act together. It all went on like some ghastly dream"—he pushed back his chair and began to pace the room as though the recollection were intolerable. "The play was invariably 'Hamlet;' I have never been able to face the thought of acting the part again. The only thing that carried me through was a sort of desperate resolve to keep up appearances for her sake. There had been, naturally enough, a certain amount of gossip about us, but few knew that we had been actually engaged, and in the very worst of the time there was a sort of odd sense of triumph, for I knew that I was acting behind the scenes with a perfection which I was never likely to touch before the curtain. It told on me, though. When the end of the season came I had been for eight nights without sleep, and after saying good-bye to her, and realising that there was no need to keep up any longer, all power of rational thought seemed suddenly to go from me. I had acted my part so well that she believed that I had become reconciled to the thought of her marriage, and I suppose she thought that I should take that position of friend, which she wished me to take. At any rate her last words were a request that I would be present at the little country church where the wedding was to take place.

"I left it uncertain whether I would go or not, and went home debating which would really be best for her, which would set her most at ease. Could I for the time efface myself so completely as to play the part of an old friend? If she had really cared for the man she was to

marry, that would have been possible; I could have rejoiced in her happiness. But this, as things were, I thought out of the question. And then in the darkness of the night, as I lay wondering stupidly which would be the best for her, a wild notion that it would be best if I were dead suddenly took possession of me. I was too worn out to think anything at all about the right and wrong of the matter; it was just an overmastering idea that crowded out every other consideration. I even forgot my own mother,—that has always seemed to me the most incredible part of the whole business. When morning came, I made my preparations and walked out, with no notion at all as to place, but only a vague wish to be away from bricks and mortar. After a time I found myself in Richmond Park, and was making for a quiet glade I knew of, when there came a sound of footsteps hurrying after me, a small boy was speaking to me, telling me I had saved him once, and begging me to accept a silver knife. Here it is you see—I have carried it ever since."

Ralph in amazement looked at his father's old fruit knife; could such a trifling thing have played so great a part in the life of his friend?

"I only parted with yours the other day at Forres," he said, "when everything that could be spared had to go to the pawnbroker."

"Well, I'm glad it is gone," said Macneillie. "This is the only souvenir needed. I have had presentations both before that time and since, but never one that touched me as yours did. Your emphatic assurance that fruit-knives were of no use to you, since you always ate peel and all, tickled my fancy and made me smile; that was the first step back to life. And then your boyish praise was so real that it pleased me, and your hero-worshipping face haunted me. It reminded me that I should be missed at any rate by some, and when I reached the glade I was glad that by a sudden impulse I had given

you my knife in exchange. Being thus disarmed there was nothing to do but to lie down and rest, and what with the heat of the day and the long walk, I somehow fell asleep at last. When I woke my brain was perfectly clear again, but there was this little embossed knife to remind me of the narrow escape I had had. I remember that in the distance the deer were feeding peacefully, and within a few hundred yards of me rabbits were scampering to and fro. A great longing for home seized me as I lay there watching them, the sort of hunger that always comes over a Scotsman when he has been long away from the mountains. So I hurried back to town, packed my portmanteau, and took the night train to the north. There! that is all I have to tell you; and perhaps now you'll understand that you are no ordinary stranger to me and to my mother, but that you belong to us."

"It is good of you to have told me," said Ralph, "to have trusted me with so much. But I, too, have a confession to make. That day, when we were in St. James' Park, Evereld and I knew who was talking with you as you walked up and down, and once when you stopped close to the water we could not help hearing what you both said. I think it was partly that which made us look on you as our special hero."

Macneillie paced the room silently, seeing with all the vividness of a powerful imagination that scene in the far past: the broad sunny path, the calm expanse of water, with its little wooded island, the white sails of the toy boat, the two children watching its progress, and beyond the trees on the further side of the park the great gloomy pile of Queen Anne's Mansions looming up against the sky. Again he seemed to stand in his misery beside the iron railing looking down into a face which was deliberately hardening itself against him, yet was still the face that haunted his dreams with its strange inexplicable fascination.

Since her marriage he had never seen Christine; at first he had purposely avoided her, and after his return from America had still deemed it prudent to refuse a London engagement, and to enter on that career as manager of a travelling company which had now for some years absorbed his thoughts and his energies. He wondered often whether their paths would ever again cross, and with a certain sturdy Scottish resolution he held on his way, neither seeking nor avoiding a meeting.

He was still talking to Ralph on this summer afternoon, when his mother came into the room with the letters of the second post.

"Ha, here is one from Edinburgh!" exclaimed Macneillie. "Now we shall hear your fate. Well, it's not much of an offer but better than nothing. Middle of June to the end of July, that will fit in well enough. To be walking gentleman after the parts you have been playing will be uninteresting, but you will at any rate be secure of your salary, and will be acting with better people. Here is the list of plays; let us see who the stars are."

Glancing down the paper he gave a perceptible start.

"That's an odd coincidence after what we were just talking about," he said, handing the list to his companion; and Ralph saw that in the first week of July, Christine Greville was to appear as *Ellen Douglas*. He hardly knew whether he were glad or sorry. Naturally his affection for Macneillie tended to make him a somewhat severe judge of the woman who, after a ten years' betrothal, had forsaken her lover and married for money; but nevertheless he wanted to meet her, and Macneillie was not ill pleased at the chance of thus learning indirectly how Christine prospered in the life she had chosen.

Somehow the news seemed to cheer them both. Macneillie stood gazing out of the window, lost in thought.

The rain had ceased, and though the sky was still in part overclouded there were little rifts of blue, and in the west a bright gleam which swept across the hills facing the window in a long level line of golden brightness. Above, were the dark mountain tops, below, in deep shade, the woods; and the points of the fir trees stood out sharply defined along the broad intervening strip of sunlit grass. He could not have explained his own feelings, but it seemed to him that some unexpected gleam of brightness had come, too, into his overclouded life.

During the days that followed something of the old hero-worship began to reassert itself in Ralph's heart as he learnt to understand more of his friend's character. To the genius and fervour and romance of the Kelt, Macneillie united a singularly strong and virile nature, and although he had shaken off some of the trammels of the school of theology to which his mother still belonged, he was emphatically one whose life was ruled by faith. This was indeed generally recognised, although he was not given to many words; but the world agreed in describing him by that unsatisfactory phrase, "a religious man," and many in the profession could testify that his religion was of that pure and undefiled kind which is known not so much by words or outward observances, as by the living of a good, manly life.

There was, to Ralph's mind, something very touching in the relations between the actor and his mother. His care in avoiding all topics that could pain her, his solicitude for her comfort, and the pleasure he took in the restful home-life, which could only be his at long intervals, formed but one side of the picture. There was the ineffable pride of the old lady in her only son, her delight in his success being only modified by the unconquerable scruples which she still felt as to the stage, scruples which were, however, difficult to maintain in all their fulness when she was every day confronted by so admirable a representative of the actor's profession.

As soon as it was practicable, Macneillie made the convalescent spend a great part of each day out of doors, at first in the garden or in the wood at the back of the house, and later on, when walking became possible, on the hill-side near the wishing-well, where far away from houses and with a glorious panorama of lake and mountain they rested for hours on the heather.

It was at these times that Ralph received some of those lessons in his art which were later on of the greatest service to him.

By the middle of June he had shaken off the last effects of the influenza, but although he was thankful to have secured an engagement, he left Callander very reluctantly, only comforting himself with the reflection that at the beginning of August he should once more be with Macneillie, and able perhaps to do a little in return for all the kindness that had been shown to him.

His Good Samaritan started him on his way with sound advice, and all things needful for a fresh beginning, and the weeks in Edinburgh passed pleasantly enough.

CHAPTER XVIII

"On the oppressor's side was power;
And yet I knew that every wrong,
However old, however strong,
But waited God's avenging hour."

WHITTIER.

AT length the day arrived when Christine Greville was to appear. A rehearsal had been called for eleven, and it so happened that Ralph reached the stage door just as the "star" with her maid in attendance drove up. He had naturally been very anxious to see her, and was pleased that their meeting should be in bright sunlight, not in the dreary gloom of the empty theatre. He caught a vision of fair hair beneath a broad black straw hat, and of blush roses that harmonised well with the beautiful but rather grave face. Then it chanced that in alighting, Miss Greville dropped her parasol, and Ralph of course promptly stooped to pick it up for her.

"Thank you," she said, and her low voice thrilled him. "It was careless of me." As she spoke her lips smiled, but he thought the brown eyes that for a moment met his fully were the saddest as well as the sweetest he had ever seen.

The doorkeeper having now perceived her hastened forward, and she passed into the building.

It was with some surprise that in glancing round she saw that Ralph also had entered. Something in his

manner had pleased her, and she presently turned to the manager with a question.

"Who is that young fellow behind us?" she inquired, lowering her voice.

"He is a pupil of Macneillie's," said the manager, "and at present is only 'walking gentleman,' but he has the makings of a good actor in him."

"Introduce him to me," said Miss Greville.

So Ralph, to his no small delight, was presented to the great lady, who gave him a cordial hand-shake.

"They tell me you are Hugh Macneillie's pupil," she said.

Ralph flushed a little.

"He has taught me more than any one else," he replied, "and it was through him that I got this engagement. In August I am to join his company."

"Ah!" she said, and Ralph fancied there was a sort of envy in her tone. "You are very fortunate to have such a chance. He is one of a thousand. Where did you come across him?"

"At Callander, soon after Whitsuntide. He has built a house there for his mother."

"She is still living? I am glad of that. She never liked me, having a rooted aversion to the stage and all connected with it, still she was kind to me in her way, though disapproving all the time."

"She still disapproves of the stage," said Ralph. "But she is kindness itself; if you could but have seen the plight I was in when Macneillie found me, and took me home with him!"

At that moment they were interrupted, but when the rehearsal was over, Miss Greville again spoke to him.

"We must finish our talk," she said. "I like to hear all about my old friends. To-morrow I am driving with my little invalid nephew to Roslin—come and join us, we shall have plenty of room for you."

Ralph was delighted with the invitation; it was quite impossible to remain a stern judge of Miss Greville now that he had seen her and spoken with her. He had wondered how it could be that Macneillie, after her faithlessness, still for her sake remained single. But he wondered no longer, for it seemed to him, that quite apart from any beauty of feature or form, she was the most inexplicably fascinating woman he had ever met. Her every movement seemed to possess a subtle charm; there was a refinement and delicacy about her manner, a delicious originality about her way of talking, that made all others in comparison with her seem tame and commonplace. There was, moreover, something that specially appealed to Ralph, in the sadness of her face when in re pose, and its brilliant beauty when animated.

There was no rehearsal the next day, and Ralph, punctual to the minute, presented himself at the Windsor Hotel, at the time appointed for the drive. He was shown into a private sitting-room where a little lame boy of about nine years old sat by the open window.

"Aunt Christine will be here directly," he said, greeting the visitor with great friendliness. "She was reading to me and forgot the time. Did you ever hear her read?"

"No," said Ralph, "what book was it?"

"Oh, only about Roslin, but it doesn't matter what she reads, she makes everything beautiful—it's the way she says the words. Mother used to read to me in Ceylon, but I never cared for it—it sounded so droney."

"Do you come from Ceylon?"

"Yes, I came last year," said the small invalid. "I live now with Aunt Christine, she's mother's sister, and I like her next best to mother in all the world. But Sir Roderick's a beast. You mustn't say I said so, but I hate him because he always says horrid, cutting things to Auntie. He's to meet us here, when Auntie's engage-

ment is over, and we are to go to the Highlands to stay at a big country house belonging to his cousin."

It was impossible to check the confidences of this small child, who, with his light brown hair, eager blue eyes and sunburnt face, was by no means the typical invalid of romance, but just a restless, high-spirited boy, brimming over with life and merriment. Perhaps it was as well that at that moment his aunt came into the room.

"So sorry to keep you waiting, Mr. Denmead," she said, greeting him in her charming way. "I was always a sadly unpunctual mortal, but Charlie has no doubt been entertaining you. Is the carriage at the door? Then we will ring for one of the waiters, Charlie, to take you down."

"He carries so badly," said the small invalid, querulously. "I wish Dugald were here."

"Well, he will come with Sir Roderick on Saturday," said the aunt. "What does the waiter do?"

"I don't know, but he hurts," said Charlie, wriggling in his big chair.

"Will you let me carry you?" said Ralph.

"Yes," said the child, with the air of a monarch bestowing a favour. "Your hands are so nice and long, not podgy little things like the waiter's."

The journey to the Stanhope having been safely accomplished, and the child comfortably installed in the back seat, Christine gathered up the reins, and with Ralph in the front seat beside her, drove off in the direction of Roslin.

"There is nothing I enjoy so much as driving," she said. "It is the one real pleasure of my life."

"Greater than such a triumph as you had last night," said Ralph.

She glanced at him with a sort of surprise.

"Did you really think I cared for that?" she said.

"How young you are—how worn and *blasée* you make me feel. I cared nothing at all for that ovation—was thankful when the din ceased and I could go home and be quiet. When one is miserable, there is at any rate some comfort in being miserable alone—you can throw aside your smiling mask, and so get something approaching to ease. It is off now, you see, and I am treating you as if you were a trustworthy, old friend, but then you are trustworthy, I could tell that the moment I saw you. Now tell me candidly, did not Mrs. Macneillie tell you she detested me?"

"No, but I heard something of your first acquaintance with them long ago," said Ralph; and then he coloured and hesitated, feeling that he had perhaps said too much.

And oddly enough Christine felt that he understood all, and knew that he would soon find out how, having sacrificed everything to ambition, it now profited her nothing.

"Auntie," cried a small voice from the back seat.

She glanced round with love and tenderness in the face that a moment before had been so sad.

"What is it, darling?"

"Why those two girls were so awfully delighted to see you. I saw one catch hold of the other's arm and say, 'There she is!' just as if you'd been the Queen herself."

She laughed, but the child's pride in her, and perhaps the remembrance that the public really loved her, touched her heart for a moment, and brought back a look of youth and gladness to her wistful eyes. She turned again to Ralph.

"Now take up our talk where it was interrupted yesterday. You were telling me what a plight you were in when Hugh Macneillie found you. How had you got into such difficulties? Couldn't you get an engagement? Tell me your story, for we two must be friends."

She was so *simpatica* that it was impossible to resist

her, and Ralph told her his story; all about the old days at Whinhaven, and his father's death; all about his adoption by Sir Matthew Mactavish and his final dismissal; all about his search for work, his first engagement, and his experiences at Washington's Theatre. Christine would have blamed him more for his folly in relinquishing his position there had she not, with her womanly insight, guessed all that he left untold of his feeling for Evereld, and understood why just at Christmas time he was in such desperate haste to get on in his profession.

With the keen interest of one who had lived the same wandering life, she heard of the adventures of Skoots' Company, and listened pityingly to the account of what Ralph called his "sixpenny tramp" through the Highlands. But when he told of the friendly shepherd who had met him in the wilds of Gaick, she made a sudden exclamation.

"Did you say the name was Linklater? Why then I think I can help you to find the lost son—my husband's man is named Dugald Linklater. He has been with us for a year, and would scarcely have endured it so long, I think, had he not been very fond of Charlie, and anxious too to get a good character. He had been valet to Lord Ederline, but had left him under a cloud, and had been out of a situation for a long while. My husband had had a succession of men, and really took this one in despair."

"Then there can be no doubt about it," said Ralph, his face lighting up. "For I know the son was Lord Ederline's servant. This will be good news for the shepherd and his wife. How odd that one should come across him in this way. The world is but a small place after all. What is he like?"

"A dark-haired Kelt, very well-mannered, and a decidedly clever fellow. I know something of his past life, for he is going to marry my maid as soon as they have

each of them saved a little money. Dugald is steady enough now, but he was nearly ruined by betting. We have very little notion, I fancy, of the sort of temptation our servants are often exposed to."

"Will he be coming to Edinburgh? Can I see him?"

"Certainly. I expect my husband on Saturday evening. Come and call on Sunday afternoon, and I will make some excuse to send Dugald round to your rooms afterwards. Then you can tell him all about his home people. But now tell me about the rest of your journey."

Ralph told the whole tale, and there were tears in his companion's eyes as he described the dire struggle of the last day of his wanderings, and his final collapse in the Pass of Leny.

"And it was there Hugh Macneillie found you?" she said tremulously.

"Yes, he is fond of going up and down that path by the river, he says it is good practice to rehearse a part in that roar of many waters. I dreamt I was back again in the theatre with Evereld, then I heard footsteps, and looked up to see his face. You can't think what a contrast it was to the faces I had seen just before in the road, with their cruel contemptuous stare; it was like looking up into the face of the Christ."

By the time they had returned from Roslin, Christine had heard all that there was to be heard, with the exception of course of the Richmond Park incident, and she was able fully to realise the sort of life which her old lover was living. She did not presume to pity Hugh Macneillie. She knew indeed that, compared with her lot, his was one to be envied; but she felt intuitively that he would never recover from the wound she had dealt him, and knew that she had deliberately robbed him of all that a man most values. Her heart was very sore that night, and Ralph, now that he knew more of her, under-

stood with how weary an effort she laughed and talked in the green room. He longed to be able to serve her, but there was of course little he could do, beyond showing Charlie the sort of kindness which a small boy best appreciates.

It was with some trepidation that, on the Sunday afternoon at the close of her engagement, he called to take leave of her. Other visitors were in the room. She just introduced him to Sir Roderick—a tall, grey-haired, and decidedly good-looking man, and then left him to make his way as usual to Charlie's couch.

The child greeted him with delight and eagerly showed him a Kodak which Christine had just given him, and with which he was longing to take snap-shots at the people in Prince's Street. "But I mustn't do it, Sir Roderick says, because of the fourth commandment and the Scotch being so particular. Now do you really think that the fourth commandment was meant to forbid Kodaks on Sunday?"

"Well no," said Ralph smiling. "I don't think it has much to do with photography or with our Sunday."

"And you see," continued the child eagerly, "even if we are not to do any manner of work—and of course, every one really does a good deal—you can't possibly call it work to take a snap-shot. Why it says, you know, in the advertisement, that it's no labour at all. '*You* press the button, *we* do all the rest,' and one wouldn't ask them to do the developing to-day. It's really not so bad as Sir Roderick's ringing the bell as he's doing now, for when he rings twice like that, Dugald has to come hurrying upstairs like lightning, and I know he has had hardly any time for his dinner."

At that moment the servant entered in response to his master's peremptory summons. Ralph watched him keenly, and had no manner of doubt that this man was the shepherd's son, for the likeness to Angus Linklater

was marked. An expressive little bit of pantomime followed; he could not hear the actual words spoken by Sir Roderick, but the insufferable tone and manner of the master and the expression of long-enduring but sorely tried patience on the face of the man, were quite sufficient to reveal much of their characters. Soon after this the visitors rose to go, and Sir Roderick having taken leave of them in a pleasant and courteous fashion, turned round on his wife the moment the door was closed, and apparently forgetting that they were not alone, hurled at her a torrent of abuse and scathing sarcasm, which made Ralph long to kick him down-stairs. It seemed to be about some salmon flies which had been left behind in London, Dugald having failed to find them in their right place, and imagining that they had been sent by his master with the first instalment of luggage brought to Edinburgh by the rest of the family some weeks ago.

In Lady Fenchurch's manner of receiving her husband's anger there was the calmness of long use, but her colour rose a little because of the injustice of the attack, and from a sort of shame that Ralph Denmead should witness the scene.

"I am sorry the mistake was made, but you forget we are not alone," she said, seizing on a moment when for want of breath he ceased to swear.

He glanced towards the window with annoyance, and with a malice which his hearers perfectly understood, suddenly changed his line.

"Well, if it is not your fault then it must be Dugald's fault. The d——d scoundrel shall leave the very day I can get another man. I'm sick of the sight of him. He shall see that I'm not to be imposed upon by an idle fellow who doesn't know his duties. He shall go, and with the worst character I ever gave to a servant. He came to me with a bad one, and I'll add a telling bit to it."

"I only wonder he has endured the situation so long."

said Christine, stung by the unfairness of this retaliation. "But you punish yourself more than you punish him; think what trouble you had before he came. The best servants must now and then make mistakes."

"The best mistresses are supposed to look to the ways of their household," he said maliciously, "and to have some regard for their husbands' comfort. D—— you, say no more. I tell you the man shall go, and if he chooses to bring an action against me for giving him a worse character than he brought with him, I'll show up his whole past life."

With that he sauntered out of the room and Ralph, with some presence of mind, picked up the Kodak and began to talk to Charlie about the best position for taking a photograph of the Scott memorial just opposite. In a few minutes Christine slowly crossed the room and sat down in a low chair beside Charlie's couch. Her white taper fingers played with the child's light hair, but she was quite silent, sitting there listlessly, with the exhausted look which people wear when they have been battling with a strong wind.

"And she might have been Macneillie's wife!" thought Ralph. "How can she endure this wretched existence!"

He was made so miserable by the sight of that worst tragedy of life—a mistaken marriage—and by the thought of the grievous pain and sorrow it had entailed, that he was quite unable to perceive how immensely both Christine and Macneillie had been developed by the consequences of that very mistake.

The woman who at seven-and-twenty had sacrificed the entire happiness of another to her own ambition and the worldly arguments of her parents, who had allowed the love in her heart to grow weak for lack of nourishment, who had been capable of utterly deceiving herself and stifling her conscience, had at four-and-thirty grown

clear-eyed and humble through much sorrow. And as for Macneillie, his years had been spent to such good purpose that no one with deep insight could have wished that he had married Christine Greville as she had been seven years ago. There had, perhaps, been truth in her assertion in St. James's Park—she might have dragged him down to a lower level. Undoubtedly, apart, they had each of them climbed a step higher, and she was more worthy of him now than in the old days.

"Auntie," said the child, breaking the silence at last, "you won't really let Dugald go, will you?"

She sighed.

"Not if I can help it, dear, but of course he is Sir Roderick's servant. Say no more about it, though. I know you are fond of him and would be sorry to lose him, but we can't always have what we like."

"I should have thought you might," said the child. "You who earn such lots of money. *Can't* you have all you like?"

She laughed, but there were tears in her eyes.

"I can have you, dear, and you are my chief pleasure now," she said caressingly. Then, shaking off her cares for awhile, she began to talk to Ralph, who at the end of the call felt more ready than ever to be her devoted servant for the rest of his life.

"How Evereld will like to hear all about her," he reflected as he went down the stairs, "there will be no end to tell her next time we meet."

He was unpleasantly roused from these reflections by encountering on the staircase Sir Roderick Fenchurch, who paused to shake hands with him in the most courteous and pleasant way imaginable, as though he had utterly forgotten that Ralph had been a witness of the stormy scene in the private sitting-room. As a matter of fact, it was so entirely his custom to abuse and swear at his wife before the child, before the servants, and before

any one staying in the house, that he never for a moment imagined that this young actor would have liked to horse-whip him for daring so to treat a woman.

All the world seemed out of joint to Ralph as he walked away from the hotel through the beautiful city whose noble buildings and grand situation made such an incongruously fair setting to the sad picture he had just looked on. He chafed bitterly against the thought of such a man as Sir Roderick ruining the happiness of his hero Macneillie, and went back to his rooms with a heart full of indignation to write the letter he felt bound to send to Callander after meeting Christine Greville. Having written sundry details as to the play they had been giving during the week, he turned to the subject which he knew would interest Macneillie.

"Miss Greville has been staying at the Windsor Hotel with her small nephew, a boy of nine, to whom she is devoted. I have been there several times, as the child took a fancy to me. He is lame, but likely they say to recover, and it is wonderful to see her care of him. Two or three times we went out driving together. She spoke much of you and of the old days. She looks as young as ever on the stage, but off it her face is careworn and awfully sad. To-day, when I went to take leave of her, Sir Roderick Fenchurch was there. He was decent enough till the other visitors were gone, but then fell into a rage with her about some salmon flies that had been forgotten; he has a tongue that cuts like a sharp razor; there's not a pin to choose between him and the ordinary, wife-beating 'pleb,'—in fact, I prefer the latter, for at any rate he can be properly punished, while this polished scoundrel with his sarcasms and his cruelties of the tongue can't be touched. She was very quiet and dignified all through this scene, but when at last he went out she looked dead tired; this sort of thing at home, and the hard work of professional life, must be more than any

one could stand for long, I should think. An odd thing has happened. I have found the son of Linklater, the shepherd who housed me so kindly in the Gaick Forest. He is now Sir Roderick Fenchurch's man, but will not be with him much longer as the brute has given him warning—chiefly to annoy his wife I believe. Dugald Linklater has just been in to see me, and I told him I had been to his home, and that they were always looking for him to come back. He promises to write to his father at once. So there is one pleasant thing in this day, which Sir Roderick Fenchurch has overclouded. What can be the purpose in creation of such brutes? They are enough to have staggered even your prophet Erskine of Linlathen."

CHAPTER XIX

"Nothing mars or misleads the influence that issues from a pure and humble and unselfish character. A man's gifts may lack opportunity, his efforts may be misunderstood and resisted; but the spiritual power of a consecrated will needs no opportunity and can enter where the doors are shut."—DEAN PAGET.

MACNEILLIE read and re-read this letter with the awful craving of a man whose love has for years been starved of all knowledge of the beloved, except the mere knowledge that she was still in the world. He had, of course, seen her name daily in the papers, and had known what plays she was acting in, but of her real life he had known nothing. He had tried to think that her marriage though necessarily falling below his ideal of married life might at any rate be as happy as the average, might at least be tranquil and not without a certain comfortable respectability. But the brief account given in Ralph's letter, and the many details which he could so easily read between the lines—filled him with misery. The post had brought him as usual a mass of correspondence; with a sigh of impatience he ran through it, then pushing it aside caught up his hat and hurriedly left the house. He was in no humour to climb the hill-side to the wishing-well; instead, he passed through the village, over Callander Bridge, and taking a little footpath across the meadows, sought out a favourite nook of his beside the river Teith, which wound its peaceful course through the hay-

fields. A tiny wood had sprung up near this walk at one part, and Macneillie had a special affection for a certain beech-tree which stood just at a bend in the river, and under its shade many of his pleasantest holiday hours were spent. He threw himself down now on the sloping bank beneath it. Everything was curiously still and peaceful; Ben Ledi rose majestically in the distance, framed by soft foliage in the foreground, and the river was emphatically one of those which "glideth at his own sweet will," a great contrast to the Leny, which dashed and foamed through its rocky pass. It was just this calm peacefulness he longed for in his inward struggle. With all the vividness of one blessed or cursed with a powerful imagination, he realised Christine as she now was. He knew instinctively that her heart had awakened from its sleep, that, with the dead failure of the *mariage de convenance,* her love which had only lain dormant had returned—but had returned of course to torture her. Hitherto he had been able to think of Sir Roderick Fenchurch with a sort of impartiality. He knew so very little about him; and it was Macneillie's nature to think well of people until they disillusioned him; he had even felt a sort of compassion for the man, because he knew that he could never really possess Christine's heart as he, for a time at any rate, had possessed it. But Ralph's picture of what the husband really was behind his society mask had driven out all gentler thoughts, had filled the Scotsman's heart with loathing, had over-clouded his whole world.

Macneillie was, however, before all things, an honest man. He had not accepted conventionally the first religious truths put before him, he had thought much, he had waited patiently, had learnt by degrees, and the hard training of his life had borne its fruit—it was impossible now, that he should remain for long in darkness. It flashed upon him that his trouble came from having stepped out of the right order; for a time he had lost that

absolute trust in God's education of every human being, which had for many years been his stronghold. The words of Ralph's letter came back to him—"brutes like Sir Roderick are enough to have staggered even your prophet Erskine of Linlathen."

The name of Thomas Erskine in itself awakened within him a whole train of memories, for he was one of the many thousands who have been rescued by the writings of that barrister, laird and saint from falling a prey to the spirit of unbelief which is the reaction alike from Calvinism and ceremonialism.

Lying under the shade of the beech-tree, the fresh air from the hills playing softly about his uncovered head, he tried to picture to himself what Erskine would have thought of this mistaken marriage, with its unhappy results, and there came back to his mind a passage in "The Spiritual Order," in which the writer spoke of the strange difficulty of retaining faith in God's loving purpose when confronted with the evils of the lanes and closes of great towns which seem to be mere hot-beds of vice and profligacy. How look on those and still believe that education was God's whole purpose in creation? "It would be impossible," said Erskine, "did we not also realise that *there is no haste with God.*"

Clearly then it was the imperfection of his own nature, the weakness—not the strength—of his love for Christine, which made him so desperately impatient at the thought of her suffering; for her sake he must learn to be "strong and patient," learn to love with a diviner love, to wait with a more perfect trust. The letter had come to him like a call to arms, he was perfectly conscious that it marked a fresh turning-point in his life; he had learnt more of Christine and her difficulties than he had known for years, and the only way in which he could interpret the meaning of it all was that he should pray for her in her grievous need more unceasingly than he had yet done.

And so the time passed by, and at the close of the six weeks' engagement Ralph returned to Callander for the few days that remained before Macneillie's company was to open at Southbourne with "The Winter's Tale."

It felt more like a home-coming than he could have imagined possible. His friend was delighted to have him back again; old Mrs. Macneillie was scarcely less so, and the servants gave him a cordial welcome, for though his illness had given a good deal of trouble in the house, he had the gift of winning hearts, and the forlorn plight in which he had first arrived had awakened all the best sympathies of the hospitable Scottish household. He fancied that Macneillie's deep-set grey eyes were somewhat graver in expression than before, but his manner, with its touch of quaint, dry humour, was exactly the same as usual, and it was not until the Tuesday morning when they set off early to walk together to the Trossachs, that any allusion was made to the contents of the letter. Then, at last, as they walked along the shores of Loch Vennachar, Macneillie put a direct question about Christine.

"I am glad you got to know Lady Fenchurch," he said. "Where did she go after leaving Edinburgh?"

"She went up to the Highlands a fortnight ago to a place called Mearn Castle, which belongs to a Mrs. Strathavon-Haigh, a widowed cousin of Sir Roderick's—a very fast widow, if what I heard in Edinburgh is true. Lady Fenchurch did not want to go there, but said her husband particularly wished her to accept the invitation. So she had given up her original plan of taking Charlie to the sea, and hoped the Highland air would do him as much good."

"I suppose she was right to try to please her husband," said Macneillie, "but Mearn Castle is one of the most abominable country houses going."

"She seemed to know very little about it," replied

Ralph, "only disliked this gay widow, and wanted to go to some quiet place where rest would have been more possible. But she evidently tries to do what can be done for her brute of a husband. Oh! if you could have seen her patience, her dignity, while that scoundrel was abusing her! I wish I could horse-whip him!"

"No need," said Macneillie, in a low voice, "for every brutal word he will one day have to give account."

Something in his manner, with its deep conviction that every wrong should in the future be righteously avenged, silenced Ralph. He felt ashamed of his vehement impatience, and was not sorry that, as they approached Loch Achray, Macneillie led away from the subject by asking after the shepherd's son.

They had passed the Hotel, and were walking through the Trossachs, when they overtook a gentleman's servant laden with a soda-water syphon and a great basket of fruit which he was evidently carrying down to Loch Katrine.

Glancing at the man, Ralph gave an exclamation of astonishment.

"Why, Linklater! is it you? I was speaking to Mr. Macneillie about you only just now."

The man's face lighted up as he returned Ralph's cordial greeting, and he looked searchingly at Macneillie, having very often heard that the actor was one of Lady Fenchurch's oldest friends.

"I little thought to see you here, sir," he said, turning to Ralph. "We came this morning from Stronachlachar, for there was a good wind for sailing, and Master Charlie was wanting to set foot on Ellen's Isle. He's there now, with her ladyship, and I came on to the Hotel to get these things for lunch."

"They have left Mearn Castle then?" said Ralph in surprise.

"Well, sir," said Linklater, with a little hesitation in

his manner, "if you've not already heard, maybe I better tell you the whole truth, for all the world will know it as soon as her ladyship sues for a divorce."

Macneillie made an inarticulate exclamation. Like one in a dream he listened to the man's brief account. It appeared that Sir Roderick had seduced the young wife of one of the game-keepers on the Castle estate—that the enraged husband discovering him had given him such a castigation that it had been impossible to hush up the affair, and that Lady Fenchurch, on learning the truth, had left Mearn Castle.

There was a pause when the man had ended. Ralph waited for his companion to ask some question, to make some comment, but Macneillie walked on in absolute silence, evidently too deeply engrossed in his own reflections to be even conscious that he was not alone.

This, then, was the meaning of his inward perception of Christine's grievous need! In this fortnight, during which his whole soul had been absorbed in prayer for her, she had lived through the most awful crisis of her life, and now she was near to him in her forlorn, unprotected, worse than widowed condition. He must at any rate, inquire if she would see him, ask if he could in any way help her, and here in this quiet spot there was fortunately no danger that idle talkers would comment on their meeting. He pencilled a few words in German on one of his cards and turned to Linklater.

"Give this to your mistress," he said, the title somehow sticking in his throat. "I will take a boat and row out to the island in a few minutes, and you can bring back the answer."

By this time they had walked through the glen and had reached the picturesque landing-place. Linklater hailed the Stronachlachar boatman, and set off for the island, and the others followed more leisurely, Ralph taking both oars and Macneillie sitting in the stern, though

the far-away look in his eyes scarcely qualified him for the duties of steersman.

The story which Linklater had told them had been so entirely unexpected, and was in itself so revolting, that neither of them felt inclined to talk. To Macneillie, moreover, it was as though he had suddenly heard of the death of the man who had saddened his life; to all intents and purposes he considered Sir Roderick as dead to Christine, for he came of a race which for more than three hundred years has always regarded adultery as the dissolution of a marriage. To him there had never been the least question as to the distinct teaching of Christ on this point, he believed that His words clearly sanctioned divorce for infidelity to the marriage bond and gave freedom to the innocent one. No *man* could rightly put asunder those who were married; sin only or death could part them. But proved infidelity was as truly the divider as love was the bond of union; the legal ceremonies, whether of marriage or of divorce, were but the appointed and expedient symbols of spiritual facts—the outward signs of the birth and death of married life.

The seven years of his solitude had taught Macneillie a stern self-control, and whatever he felt as they rowed across the lake was not allowed to appear at all in his face. Ralph glanced at him from time to time and marvelled, perhaps only now realising of what splendid stuff his hero was made, and how nobly he held in check that difficult temperament with which actors, artists and musicians are usually endowed.

"Which side is the best landing-place?" he asked as they drew near to the lovely wooded island.

"To the right in that bit of a creek," said Macneillie, beginning to pay heed to the steering. "There is the boat, I see, but the men are both out of it."

As he spoke they glided into the little, rocky cleft with its overhanging trees, its moss-grown boulders, its patches

of crimson heather and purple ling. Then came a few minutes of utter silence, as they waited for Linklater's return; Ralph felt anxious and restless, each minute seemed to him an hour, and he feared that perhaps after all Christine Greville would refuse to see any one. As for Macneillie he just waited like one who is intently listening, but Ralph was not sure that the listening was for Christine's voice or for the servant's approaching footsteps, he had a suspicion that it was for something much more inward.

At length, to his great relief, there came a rustling among the boughs and a trampling of feet, and in a minute Linklater was striding down over the rocks towards the boat, bearing a note in his hand. Macneillie thanked him as he took the missive, and unfolding it less deftly than might have been expected of a seasoned actor, read the following words:

"You are the only man I could bear to speak to yet; please come."

He promptly stepped on shore, but Ralph lingered.

"I will stay in the boat," he suggested, "and have a pipe."

"Master Charlie is very anxious you should come and help him with his Kodak, sir," said Linklater, respectfully. "He's just up here at the top, and her ladyship is at the further side of the island, sketching."

"Very well, then, I'll come," said Ralph, and he followed his friend up the steep ascent.

In a little clearing at the top they found the small boy, who gave a war-whoop of delight as Ralph emerged from the brushwood.

"If I hadn't had such an awful longing for gooseberries, Dugald would never have met you!" he said gleefully. "Auntie is over there making a sketch, she's hidden right away by the trees, but don't go to her just yet, do stay and help us lay the things out for lunch, Dugald

is going to make a fire and boil some water, he thinks Auntie will like some tea, she's been having such dreadful headaches the last few days." Macneillie heard no more, he left Ralph and the child, and Dugald Linklater, and made his way straight through the tangle of shrubs, trees, and bushes, in the direction that Charlie had indicated. There was a gleam of white between the green leaves—it was the sun lighting up the sketching-block on her easel; in another moment he had parted the thickly-growing branches and had seen her once more.

She was sitting on a fallen tree—not attempting to sketch, but with her elbows propped on her knees and her face hidden by one of those shapely white hands he had so often kissed; the sun made a dazzling glory of her fair hair; her light grey dress and grey straw hat seemed exactly to harmonise with the green trees and the patches of heather. She had always had that instinct of "fitness" which makes some women know exactly what to wear, and when to wear it.

Macneillie stood for a minute watching intently the down-bent head, his heart throbbing so fast that he felt half-choked. At last, putting force upon himself, he moved forward. His step recalled her from her sad reverie, and starting to her feet with the nervous alarm of one who has lately undergone some great shock, she looked round as though in terror of pursuit. That startled movement, and the momentary expression he had seen in her pale face, strengthened Macneillie as nothing else could have done; he forgot all about himself, realised only that she wanted his protection.

"You need not be afraid," he said, taking her hand in his, "of what use are old friends if not to help you in time of need?"

She struggled hard to reply, but her eyes swam with tears, her lips refused to frame a word.

"Let us sit down here and talk things over quietly,"

said Macneillie; "as I wrote to you just now, Dugald Linklater told us what had passed at Mearn Castle."

"He told you what he knew," said Christine in a broken voice. "He could not tell you of my interview with Sir Roderick." She paused for a minute, then the pent-up torrent of words broke forth. "I have heard of women, yes, and of men, too, refusing to be separated from a guilty partner; but there must at least be a genuine repentance to make such a plan even moral. There was none with Sir Roderick. He was vexed at the discovery, but he made light of the sin itself. In my presence he laughed over the affair. The house seemed like hell. I could not have stayed in it another hour!"

The look of shrinking horror in her face tortured Macneillie, who could so well understand how her whole being recoiled from the foul atmosphere that had surrounded her. It was because he understood how she felt herself degraded by all she had lived through that he intuitively stretched out his hand for hers, and held it in a strong, firm clasp.

"Do not dwell on all this," he said, "but tell me how I can help you."

His quiet, tender voice, the reverence of his manner quickly soothed her. She looked up into his face, and by that mere look seemed to draw in endless stores of strength and comfort.

"Do you know," she exclaimed with seeming irrelevance, "what Ralph Denmead said about the day you found him in the Pass of Leny, when he was lying there ill and half-starved, and looked up to see you bending over him? He said it was like looking up into the face of the Christ!"

"Poor boy!" said Macneillie. "He was in an awful plight, no one with a grain of kindliness in his nature could have passed him by. He has made me his debtor for life now, though; it is through him that I have met you to-day."

"We little thought," said Christine, "that those two children in St. James's Park, playing with their boat, would have anything to do with our future. How is it, though, that you are grateful to him for bringing about this meeting? It is I who am grateful to him. But you who have so much to forgive—you who have avoided me all these years——?"

"I dared not seek you out," said Macneillie, "our paths parted naturally, and it was safer so. What could I have done for you then? But now all is different. Are none of your people coming to be with you?"

"There is no one to come. As you heard, I daresay, my father died four years ago."

"Yes, I saw the notice in the papers," said Macneillie.

"He lived just long enough," she resumed, "to see how miserably his scheme had failed. I had married to please him and to help the family. Well, my sister's husband, with no help at all from me or my position, got an excellent appointment in Ceylon, so there again the scheme proved useless. Three years ago my mother went out to live with her there, she could do nothing to make me less miserable, and it only pained her to see my unhappiness. She realises things less at a distance, and now she is too much of an invalid to bear the return voyage. A year ago they sent me back Charlie, Clara's little boy, and he has been a great comfort. Except for him I am quite alone."

"I want you to understand," said Macneillie, "that it is still my highest happiness to serve you. It is quite possible that in the difficult position you are in you may need the help of a friend."

"Do I deserve your friendship?" she said questioningly; "you stood aloof all these years—you would not be my friend then, though I asked you."

"If I had been a worse man I should have accepted the

place you offered in your company," said Macneillie; " or perhaps if I had been a better man, I could entirely have effaced myself and dared to take such a perilous post. But as things were, it seemed best to go right away. Did you not understand? "

" Yes, yes," she said in a choked voice. " I understood—and honoured you. Is it only seven years since you and I acted together? It seems to me a life-time. All that has gone between has been a sort of dreadful nightmare. And the worst of it was the feeling that I had deserved the misery, had deliberately chosen the low level and fought against you when you tried to drag me up. Oh, it is so long since I had a real friend to talk to—may I tell you all? "

" Of course," he said, gently. " Why not? "

" After a year of it I had grown almost desperate," she said, clenching her hands tightly, like one in pain, " and the season's work had tired me out; it seemed no use to try any longer even to live an honest life. There was only one thing that still held me back. I knew if I sank lower still it would grieve you more than all, and the thought of the pain I had already given you was always with me. Then one Sunday afternoon I happened to be alone. Sir Roderick had gone to stay with some friends for the Ascot week, and there came to me a little girl bringing a note from Lucy Seymour—you remember how soon after you and I were engaged we had been able to help her when she was in great trouble. Well, she wrote that her husband had died abroad and that she had just returned with her child, was herself dying and wanted to see me. I went to her at once and found her in great poverty, and in terror of being turned out of her lodgings before the end. Her life, she said, had been a very happy one, thanks to you and me. Oh, if you could have heard her gratitude for the past. Every word she said seemed to draw me back from the horrible indifference that had

paralysed me—she somehow stirred up all my best memories. She had heard that you were in America, or she would have appealed first to you, for the help had been chiefly your doing."

"Did she die?" asked Macneillie.

"Yes, about ten days after that Sunday. I had promised to send her little girl to school, and to befriend her, if, later on, she went into the profession, and after that Lucy seemed actually to long for death, young as she was. I saw her every day, and the last night they sent word to the theatre that there was a sudden change for the worse. Directly my part was over, I went to her; she died very happily and peacefully, just as day was breaking. I had never seen any one die before, and on the stage death is always made somehow to seem like an end, a grand sort of finale. But Lucy's death was not like an end at all, it was as quiet and serene as if she had been merely turning a page in a book. I can't describe to you how it altered all my ideas. Afterwards there was her little girl to care for, and that helped me too, and though I knew everything must still be hard, I tried after that—tried my very best to please Sir Roderick, and as far as I could to make our home life more endurable. We had each of us been much to blame in marrying without any real love, and I knew that I must 'dree my weird,' as you used to say. Well, it is over now—over, and I can hardly yet realise things. Last night I wrote to my solicitor."

"I hope he is a good one," said Macneillie.

"Yes, Mr. Marriott, of Basinghall Street; but I am half afraid whether he himself is back yet from his voyage."

"Ralph Denmead may know, he is an old friend of his. I will inquire. But in any case many months are sure to pass before all the legal forms are gone through, and in the meantime you will have to live as quietly and guardedly as possible. Have you realised that?"

"Yes," she said, with a little shiver. "A fortnight of country-house life, in such a place as Mearn Castle, makes one realise evil more keenly than years on the stage."

She remembered miserably the people she had met there—men and women so utterly unprincipled that she loathed and despised them. She remembered the callous indifference with which her husband had observed all the annoyances to which she was subjected. She remembered the age-long hours, unoccupied by professional work—barren of all that could be called employment.

And then, turning from the past as from some hideous dream, she thought how restful it was to be here in this little island, with the man whose heart had never faltered from its allegiance, the lover whose self-sacrificing constancy was as untiring as the love of God. Never from his lips would she have heard such words as had filled her with a sense of degradation at Mearn Castle. It was the depth of his love, the fineness of his reverence, which kept him now from expressing the passion which she knew filled his heart. He would wait till the law had declared her freedom—would wait and think only of how she could best be shielded from the strife of tongues."

"If you are really at a loss for some quiet place, and for friends who can rightly protect you, why should you not go for a time to the Herefords' house near Firdale?" said Macneillie.

"I know them very slightly," she objected. "Besides, is not that meant for people who have no money?"

"Monkton Verney is for all, I think, who are in need—it's a Cave of Adullam—and though you don't know Mr. and Mrs. Hereford well, you know Miss Claremont and she is the practical head of things."

"I will at any rate write to her, she is a wonderful woman for understanding," said Christine. "I am glad you reminded me of her."

Macneillie stood up, for he knew that it would be unwise to stay longer, and that he must somehow tear himself away.

"Write and let me know whether you go there," he said; "and don't forget that if I can do anything for you in any way, I have at least the right of an old friend. I see the steamer over yonder, and before long a host of people will be at the landing-stage and some of them may be rowing out to visit Ellen's Isle. Even here, in this paradise, Satan walks you see in the shape of the gossiping British tourist; and your face and mine are public property. I might do harm by staying here."

"Not even here," she sighed, "in this lonely place? And it's so long since I saw you!"

He took her hand in his, and held it for a minute tenderly; looking into his face, the beauty of its expression of strong patience startled her.

"No, not even here," he said with a quiet smile. "Your reputation is too precious to me. But remember that in any difficulty or danger I have the first right to help you."

His courage nerved her to face the parting and even to assume an air of cheerfulness.

"I must come back to Charlie," she said. "He is sure to be hungry, and there will be plenty of time for you to have lunch, too, before any tourists molest us."

So together they walked to the little encampment, where they found the photographers fraternising over the Kodak, while Dugald had the tea just ready. And since laughter and tears are not far apart, and the very people who have lived through a tragedy are happily the ones most easily moved to see all that is humorous in daily life, there followed a cheerful meal which might have surprised and even shocked a mere superficial observer of life, but contained elements of comfort in it for all who understood the griefs and trials of human-kind.

Crowning it all was the unalloyed happiness of the child, whose beaming face and ringing laughter soothed Christine's sore heart as nothing else could have done.

"*Auf wiedersehen!*" said Macneillie, when the last moment had come, and Christine said nothing, but all her soul seemed in her eyes as she lifted them to his.

CHAPTER XX

"Paint those eyes, so blue, so kind,
Eager tell-tales of her mind;
Paint with their impetuous stress
Of inquiring tenderness;
Those frank eyes, where deep doth lie
An angelic gravity."

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

THE last day of Evereld's school life was drawing to a close, "packing day" as they called it, and when it had been a mere question of the beginning of the holidays it had always been a rather festive occasion. But on this last evening, standing at the threshold of a new untried life, there was a good deal of sadness about it, and her usually bright face was a little clouded as she paced up and down a shady garden walk with her special friend Bride O'Ryan. The merry voices of the younger children, as they played hide and seek, and now and then a distant sound of applause from those who were watching the tennis players, made her feel melancholy, for to-morrow she would no longer have her nook in this happy, busy hive of industry, would no longer have a share in the genial life, but would be in a very different home, a home which was not her own, which had never seemed in the least homelike, and to which she did not at all want to return. A happy remembrance caused her cheerfulness to return.

"Oh, Bride!" she exclaimed, "perhaps, after all, Sir Matthew will let me spend the next fortnight with you as we begged. He won't let me go to Ireland, he was quite set against that, but he may say yes to your sister's second letter."

"To be sure," said Bride, with her most good-humoured smile. "Why should he be saying no to such a sensible plan? He can't wish to have you in town for the first part of August. Doreen has plenty of room for you in this house she has taken on the Parade, and we will bathe every day, and have no end of fun."

"Here comes Aimee with a letter. Bride, I believe it will be from Sir Matthew; things come just when one is talking about them."

A pretty dark-haired girl now approached them.

"Fraulein asked me to give you this note," she said, "I believe it is from Cousin Doreen."

"Yes, that's Doreen's writing," said Bride. "Read it quickly, do."

And Evereld read as follows:

"MY DEAR EVERELD,

We shall be delighted if you will spend the next fortnight with us here at Southbourne. Sir Matthew is quite willing that you should do so, though he cannot spare you to us after the 14th August, as he wishes you to go with him to Switzerland. I would have liked you to see our Irish mountains first; however, they can hold their own very well against any Alp ever created, and you must come and stay with us next year instead. Tell Bride to bring you as early to-morrow morning as you like.

Yours affectionately,

DOREEN HEREFORD."

This note gave general satisfaction, and the three friends yielded to the entreaties of some of the younger children and entered with spirit into the game of hide and seek, Evereld feeling all the delight of a reprieve as she realised that for a whole fortnight she should be able to stay at Southbourne and to postpone the parting with Bride.

The next morning when, somewhat saddened by all the partings they had been through, the two girls were driving down to the Parade, they suddenly caught sight of a huge poster announcing the advent on the following

Monday of Mr. Hugh Macneillie's Company, and the performance of "The Winter's Tale," "The Rivals" and "The Lady of Lyons." Evereld knew nothing of Ralph's movements; nothing had been heard from him since the Easter holidays, when he had still been travelling in Scotland. She looked, however, with no small interest at this poster, having always remembered their childish worship of Macneillie.

"I have never seen 'The Winter's Tale,'" said Bride. "We must certainly go. Doreen is always delighted if we want to see one of Shakspere's plays."

By this time they had arrived at their destination and Evereld who already knew her friend's family very intimately found herself in the midst of a lively babel of voices, warmly greeted by pretty Mrs. Hereford, hugged by her three children, and speedily made to feel quite at home.

"How is Dermot?" asked Bride.

"Much better," replied her sister, "you will find him with Mollie in the drawing-room. Let me see, Evereld has not yet met him. We must present the family patriot to you. Poor boy he has always been unlucky, and since his release a year ago from Clonmel gaol he has been desperately ill."

Evereld felt a little in awe of the released victim of the Coercion Act, but he proved to be the gentlest-mannered of mortals, and her womanly heart went out at once to the hollow-cheeked, large-eyed invalid whose humourous smile only seemed to add to the pathos of his face.

She was sitting the next day beside his Bath-chair on the Parade while Mrs. Hereford read to her children when, as she was watching the sedate couples who passed by in their Sunday best, she suddenly perceived at a little distance a figure that seemed strangely familiar. Surely no one but Ralph had precisely that quick, light step? His face was turned away from her, he was intent on the

sea, watching the waves like one who loved them and had no attention to bestow on anything else. He was almost passing them with only the breadth of the Parade between when a puff of wind suddenly whirled away a paper which Dermot had been reading, and hastily glancing round he picked it up and crossed over to restore it to its owner.

"Ralph!" exclaimed Evereld springing to her feet.

"You are here still!" he cried, his whole face lighting up, "I thought your holidays would certainly have begun. What good fortune to find you so unexpectedly."

"I have left school and am staying with Mrs. Hereford for a fortnight. I must introduce you to her."

Mrs. Hereford knew all about Ralph Denmead, and had always felt that he had been harshly treated by Sir Matthew Mactavish. She looked at him now searchingly and she liked him. He had one of those sensitive mouths that droop a little at the corners in depression or fatigue, but smile as other mouths cannot smile. The classical nose and well-moulded chin added character to what was otherwise just a pleasant, boyish face, bearing upon it the stamp—"good cricketer." And the thick brown hair not quite so closely cropped as the hideous prevailing fashion demanded, and the absence of beard or moustache bespoke him an actor. What she liked best about him, however, were his clear honest brown eyes, which had the power of lighting up with a most refreshing mirthfulness. There was something touching in the unfeigned delight of the friends in this wholly unexpected meeting, and Mrs. Hereford was determined that they should have the chance of an uninterrupted talk.

"There is still an hour before tea-time," she said, glancing at her watch. "Take Mr. Denmead to see the view at the end of the Parade, Evereld, and then let us all come home together."

The two fell in with this plan very readily. The only difference between them and the couples Evereld had

lately been watching was that they walked much faster and talked a great deal more. For there was much to tell and to hear, and Evereld wanted to learn every detail of the unlucky Scotch tour, and was delighted above measure to think that their hero Macneillie should have come to the rescue so opportunely.

"We saw that his Company was here to-morrow for a week," she said, blithely. "How little I dreamed that you were with him, Ralph. Mrs. Hereford is going to take us to see 'The Winter's Tale.' I do hope you have a nice part."

"Yes, I am Florizel. It's a very nice part indeed," said Ralph. "And there is such a jolly country dance. You'll like that. You can't think what a difference it is to be in a Company like this after travelling with those awful Skoots."

"Which was the worst of the two, the husband or the wife?"

"Oh the husband was a swindler, but Mrs. Skoot passes description. How she did hate me, too! If I had had the money to do it I might easily have brought an action against her for abusive language. Towards the end of the time she was never quite sober and once at a railway station she was so hopelessly drunk that she tumbled headlong down a flight of steps, alighting exactly on the top of my bath, which she nearly knocked into a cocked hat! We know now that all the weeks they were not paying us a penny, so that many of us were half starved, she had money of her own hoarded away, and no doubt they are living on it comfortably enough."

"What became of that poor little Ivy Grant?"

"She stayed for a week with my old landlady and then managed to get into another travelling company, where she seems to be getting on well. The Professor died just after her return. He was no protection to her, poor old man, in fact it was quite the other way. She had to sup-

port him, he was invalided and a confirmed opium-eater. Still it seems lonely for Ivy. She is a very plucky little girl though, and will, I fancy, get on well in the profession. Now tell me about yourself. How did you get to know Mrs. Hereford? and who is she?"

"She is the married sister of my great friend at school, Bride O'Ryan; you will see Bride when we go back to tea, and I know you'll like her. Every one likes her, she is such fun and she is always so good-tempered. Mrs. Hereford lives partly in Ireland, but most of the year in Grosvenor Square because her husband is in Parliament. And Bride will live with her now that she has left school. They were all left orphans, and Mrs. Hereford, who was a good deal older than the others, brought them up. I never knew anyone so good and delightful as she is."

"I can't think where I heard the name of Hereford just lately," said Ralph musingly.

"Perhaps it was from Mr. Macneillie, I think Mrs. Hereford has met him once or twice."

"That was it," said Ralph, "Macneillie was telling me how Mr. Hereford gave up his property, Monkton Verney, and turned it into a sort of Cave of Adullam."

He did not mention to Evereld that Christine Greville was now staying at this very place. Sooner or later she was sure to hear the whole story, but he shrank from telling her what had passed at Mearn Castle, and in no other way could he explain the step Lady Fenchurch had taken.

"What is Mr. Hereford like?" he inquired.

"I like him very much," said Evereld; "he is down here until to-morrow, so you will see him for yourself. Bride says that till he was married he never seemed to settle down to anything, that he was the sort of man everyone expected to do great things, and he never did them. But afterwards it was quite different; he began to work very hard, and now she says out in county Wicklow the peasants love him, and he makes such a good landlord. Bride says he's almost as Irish as they are."

"And you are here with them for a fortnight? Where after that?"

"With the Mactavishs in Switzerland. We shall be a party of six altogether. I am to go to keep Lady Mactavish company, for Minnie will be a good deal taken up you see with Major Gillot; they are engaged, the wedding is to be this autumn. Then there will be Sir Matthew and Mr. Bruce Wylie."

"The inevitable Wylie!" said Ralph impatiently. "I hate that man."

"And I like him very much," said Evereld perversely. "You always had a most unfair prejudice against him. He will certainly be the life of the party. I was delighted to hear that he was going."

Ralph's face grew grave, there was an expression in it which startled Evereld as he turned towards her.

"Tell me in earnest," he said anxiously. "Do you really like this man?"

Her truthful eyes met his fully.

"Only as I like an elderly man who used to give us chocolates and treats when we were children," she said quietly.

Ralph in his relief laughed aloud.

"He wouldn't be flattered if he knew that you called him elderly. He thinks himself just in his prime. How long shall you be abroad?"

"Six weeks I think," said Evereld.

There was a silence. They had walked to the extreme end of the Parade and had wandered down to the sea itself. "Let us sit here by this boat," she suggested. "It is so hot walking."

Ralph silently assented; she glanced at him in some perplexity. Why had he so suddenly become quiet and troubled.

"Something has vexed you," she said gently, yet with a smile. "A penny for your thoughts."

"I am thinking," said Ralph, "how hard it is that every holiday-maker, every idle lounger in Switzerland will have the chance of being with you while I am altogether cut off from your set, and can only think how other men will be making love to you."

"They won't," she said in low tones. "A girl can always stop that if she chooses. I have heard Mrs. Hereford say so."

"If you were going to be with her it would be more bearable. But you will be with Sir Matthew, whose one idea is how to make other people and other people's money serve his purposes. Don't stop me Evereld—I can't help it—I distrust him and with very good cause. He and his hateful speculations were the death of my father. I have proof of that, actual proof."

"Then I am surprised at nothing," said Evereld, understanding now all the ill-concealed dislike and antagonism between Sir Matthew and Ralph which had often puzzled her in past times.

"He ruined my childhood," said Ralph hotly, "and must I now stand calmly by while he ruins the rest of my life? Evereld!"—there was a passionate appeal in his voice which stirred the very depths of her heart, "I have no right yet to ask you to be my wife—my career is only beginning—but my darling, I love you—I love you!"

He saw her flush and tremble, but she was quite silent. Her words about a girl always being able to stop that sort of thing if she chose came back to his mind.

"Are you angry with me?" he said pleadingly. "I meant to have waited for years before speaking, but I was carried away."

She lifted her blue eyes to his, they were bright and dewy, and in her face there seemed to be the glow of sunrise.

"I am glad you didn't wait, Ralph," she said softly.

Whereupon Ralph had the audacity to kiss her in the full light of day as they sat under the shelter of the boat; and no one was any the wiser save an old fisherman who was blest with exceptionally long eyesight; he, with a smile, fell to thinking of his own young days, and softly sang as he filled his Sunday pipe the refrain of a sailor's song:

"Polly, my Polly,
She is so jolly,
The bonniest lass in the world!"

The two were silently but rapturously happy, and it was some little time before any thought of other people came to trouble Ralph. As for Evereld her heart seemed to beat to the rhythm of his words, "I love you!" and she was not at all disposed to consider the question which soon formed itself in his mind.

"I wonder whether I was wrong to speak," he said. "You must remember darling that you are free, altogether free. After all, you have seen nothing of the world. You are not to let the thought of my love bind you."

"Perhaps I ought not to make a promise while I am Sir Matthew's ward," said Evereld. "That is the only thing which would make me wish to wait; and now that we understand each other the waiting ought not to be too hard."

"Suppose you tell Mrs. Hereford just the whole truth," said Ralph, "and see what she advises. I shall feel happier about it if you have someone to turn to, and if she is what she seems to be one could trust her with anything. I wish I could talk to her some day."

"Well that can easily be managed," said Evereld. "I will tell her to-night. I am sure you are right about that. Though Sir Matthew is untrustworthy we can trust her, and as I am under her care here it seems right somehow that she should know."

"She will certainly think me the most presumptuous fellow she ever met," said Ralph. "Looking at it from an outsider's point of view it is as bad as it can be. A fellow who is not quite one and twenty, and only earning three pounds a week! Mrs. Hereford will call me 'The first of the Fortune Hunters,' and will warn you against me."

"We shall see," said Evereld laughing. "I shall be very much disappointed in her if she doesn't understand you better."

"Are you sure that you understand me?" he said wistfully.

"Yes," she said, her sweet eyes smiling into his. "I have summered and wintered you a great many times, as Bridget would say, and I very well know Ralph that you would much prefer it if my father had left me three hundred instead of three thousand a year. I think it is a little foolish of you, for as long as we share it what does it matter which side it comes from?"

A church clock striking four warned them that they must hasten back, and when they rejoined the others they were chatting together so naturally that no one dreamt what an important scene in their drama had been played at the other end of the beach.

Ralph found himself speedily made to feel at home in the delightful atmosphere of the Irish household, with its mirth and good humour, its cheerful babel of voices. It delighted him to think that Evereld who had known nothing of real family life should have found such friends, and he went back to his rooms later on in the highest spirits.

The Herefords had guessed nothing of his story and the O'Ryans had been too much taken up with their own merry discussions to be very observant, but Macneillie saw at a glance the change that had come over his pupil.

"Well?" he said in his genial voice. "What good fortune has befallen you?"

"I have found Evereld," said Ralph blithely. "She is staying on the Parade with the Max Herefords. Here's a note for you, by the bye. They want us to breakfast with them to-morrow at half past nine, it was the only free time, for they lunch at one, as he has to go up to town, and I knew rehearsal wouldn't be over by then."

"No," said Macneillie lighting a cigarette, "in your present mood you're about as likely to give your mind to Shakspere as that lover and his lass," glancing at a very demonstrative couple on the other side of the road.

"We shall have a long and wearing rehearsal to-morrow."

"I don't understand you, Governor," said Ralph, using the old stage word for the Manager as he generally did now to Macneillie, and somehow conveying by it just the reverence and affection which he felt for the Scotsman.

"I have an unfair advantage over you," said Macneillie smiling. "I have heard a great deal about Miss Evereld Ewart and know that she is likely to distract you from your labours."

"You have heard of her? From whom?"

"From you yourself, to be sure, in the feverish nights you had at Callander. I have long been wishing for the opportunity of quoting Mrs. Siddons to you, 'Study, study, study, and don't marry until you are thirty.'"

"Well we can't even be engaged yet," said Ralph; but we understand each other and that is something. To-morrow you must see her."

"I will devote myself to her entirely," said Macneillie with a mirthful twinkle in his grey eyes. "And you in the meantime can be profitably improving your Irish accent with Mrs. Hereford with a view to Sir Lucius O'Trigger. Your brogue doesn't quite satisfy me yet."

CHAPTER XXI

"So, from her sky-like spirit, gentleness
Dropt ever like a sun-lit fall of rain,
And his beneath drank in the bright caress
As thirstily as would a parched plain,
That long hath watched the showers of sloping grey
For ever, ever, falling far away."—LOWELL.

AFTER Ralph had left, a more sombre hue stole over Evereld's glowing sky. She began to think a little of the future, of the countless partings in store for them, and the more she thought the more silent and grave she became.

"You look tired, my dear," said Mrs. Hereford as they walked back from church. "Come in with me and rest. The others have set their hearts on a stroll by the sea, but you had a long walk this afternoon."

"Yes," said Evereld, sitting down beside her hostess near the open window and looking out into the calm summer evening. "I wanted to tell you about our walk. And if ever you have time Ralph would so much like to talk to you too."

The words were said with an effort and Mrs. Hereford glanced at the sweet girlish face with its downcast eyes and understood in a moment what was coming.

"You two are very old friends," she said. "Bride told me that you had been brought up together and that a very nice German lady had done a great deal for you."

"Yes," said Evereld, falling naturally into all the old memories. "I don't know what we should have done without her. You see the Mactavishs never really cared for us. But she cared, and dear old Bridget and Geraghty the butler; and Ralph was just like my brother until the day Sir Matthew turned him out of the house. He failed you know in the exam. for the Indian Civil, and they had a quarrel and Ralph had to go. It was only in that dread-

ful time after he had gone that I understood how I cared for him."

"And had you not met him at all since then?" asked Mrs. Hereford.

"Yes, we met once by accident in the Christmas holidays and then I thought, I fancied, that he cared a little. But he said nothing till to-day, and now we understand each other, only Ralph will not let me bind myself in any way; he had not meant to speak yet at all, he said, but oh, I am so glad he didn't wait."

Mrs. Hereford took the girl's hand in hers and stroked it silently. Her thoughts had flown back to a day in her own life when just such an understanding had been arrived at, she had been about the same age as Evereld, and looking back now she felt sad as she realised how much inevitable pain and suspense lay before this girl, what dire possibilities of misunderstanding, what weary hours of separation.

"That is just what I should have said," she answered after that brief pause. "But now, understanding all it involves, I confess I don't want Mollie and Bride to be in a hurry to follow your example. I want them to have five or six years of free happy girlhood before all the deeper joys and cares begin. Of course we can't choose, and for you and Mr. Denmead, who have no real home, no near relations, very likely it is the best and happiest way. I am glad you told me about it, and you must promise if ever you need anyone to help you, to come to me. I suppose you can hardly make a confidant of Lady Mactavish?"

"No," said Evereld, half laughing, half crying. "They are all so horrid about Ralph. When I am one and twenty and we can really be engaged of course they must all know, but to tell them this could do no good and might do great harm."

"Sir Matthew did not insist then on your altogether breaking with your friend when he was sent away?"

"No," said Evereld, "I don't think anyone troubled to think about it until last Christmas. Then when I met him and told Sir Matthew about it, he did say something of the sort, but I told him I couldn't leave off being Ralph's friend, and he was very kind and did not forbid my writing to him in the holidays. If Ralph succeeds on the stage I believe Sir Matthew will be rather proud of him after all. He does so like people who succeed. I suppose we may still write to each other now and then."

"Oh, I think as long as there is nothing underhand about it you may continue to write," said Mrs. Hereford. "You will write as friends, not as lovers; you must deny yourselves that luxury until you come of age. I am not preaching what I haven't practised, dear, for we had four years of that sort of thing before I was actually engaged. There are great drawbacks but I think some advantages."

"Surely many advantages," said Evereld. "And I am much more alone in the world than you were. You had brothers and sisters."

"Yes, and a profession which was very absorbing," said Mrs. Hereford, suppressing a sigh. "Oh, I do think it is a very great gain for you, only I want you to realise that it is the sort of life that needs no end of patience and courage and strength. There will be days when all will not be so bright as you fancy. But I won't croak any more. You are likely to be much better at waiting than I was, for impulsiveness is the bane of all Irish folk."

"And you will talk to Ralph?" pleaded Evereld, knowing how much he would value the sympathy and counsel of such a woman, and secretly longing that Mrs. Hereford should know him and appreciate him better.

"Yes, to be sure," said her hostess, with the smile that had won so many hearts. "We will collogue together after breakfast."

She was true to her promise and while Macneillie was amusing everyone with stories of various *contretemps* of

stage life, she contrived to carry off Ralph to see the invalided patriot; after which they had a cosy little talk in the drawing-room with no one but Baby Donal, a sturdy little man of three, to keep them company.

"Evereld has told me about yesterday afternoon," said Mrs. Hereford, who was quite well aware that she must plunge boldly into the very heart of the matter and not wait for him to beat about the bush.

"I should never have spoken so soon if it had not been for the thought of her Swiss tour with that knave and his solicitor," said Ralph hotly. "Forgive me for the expression, but it is not too strong for him."

Mrs. Hereford laughed a little.

"You needn't measure your words so carefully; a Kelt is accustomed to much more fiery language than that. And you really think Sir Matthew Mactavish a knave? I confess he is a man I intuitively dislike, but I thought he was a great philanthropist and very much respected."

"So he is," said Ralph, his face hardening, "but some day the world will find him out. Some day when he has ruined and murdered others as he ruined and murdered my father. What a mistake it is only to hang people who are taken red-handed! They should rather hang the speculators whose victims may be reckoned by hundreds. There are far more cruel ways of murdering people than by poison, or knives, or guns."

She had watched him closely as he spoke and saw that his wrath and indignation were genuine and deep. A great pity filled her heart, and she understood how intolerable it must seem to Ralph that the girl he loved should still be in the power of this despicable sham philanthropist.

"I think you were quite right to speak to Evereld," she said warmly. "And now that you have spoken, the worst of your anxiety ought to be over. The knowledge that you belong to each other will be strength to both of you."

All the bitterness died out of his face at her words, leaving it once more frank and boyish, and ingenuous as it was meant to be. The rasping sense of injustice had done some damage to his character, but the goodness of Macneillie and the gift of Evereld's love had already done much to obliterate the traces of the evil influence. His heart went out now to the brave noble-minded woman who so readily gave him her thought and sympathy.

"Evereld told me you would understand," he said gratefully, "I don't think I could have kept silent, but of course evil-minded people are sure to say that it is only her fortune I want."

"Evil be to him that evil thinks," said Mrs. Hereford. "No one who had talked with you for half an hour even could believe you a fortune hunter. And when you have lived as many years as I have done in public life, you will learn to trouble yourself very little indeed as to what people say. We shall never be true to ourselves, or of much use to any good cause, till the fear of public opinion has died in us."

"Does living in public life teach one that? I should have thought it would have taught one to howl with the wolves, to be always on the look-out for ways of pleasing the public and stroking people the right way, to dread nothing so much as alienating or offending your audience."

"Many people would agree with that view, but I believe it is false for all that. Why meddle with what does not concern you? Your work is to live your own life, to be just and independent, to be true to your own conscience, and to be a hard-working actor. You have nothing to do with the result on other people, you can never tell what it may be; and even if you pare down your actions till you fancy they will please everyone you will end by forfeiting the esteem of all. It's like the old fable of the man who first rode his ass to market and finally carried it."

"Certainly Macneillie's life is ruled in the way you approve," said Ralph thoughtfully. "There never was a manager who so sturdily refused to bow down to the public. He will not humour the depraved taste for morbid and dubious plays which has taken possession of the country of late, but insists on giving only what is really good. The result, however, is that while a manager who runs one of these risky modern plays makes a fortune, Macneillie merely earns a competence."

"That may be," said Mrs. Hereford, "but the result also is that the one Manager is a curse to his country and the other a Godsend. Your habit of mind isn't so commercial that you measure success by the solid gold it brings in."

"I hope not," said Ralph laughing. "But to one who knows how hard and wearing and anxious the life of such a man is bound to be, want of great visible success seems rather rough. However, to return to the point we started from, it is a great comfort to know that you don't think I was wrong to speak to Evereld yesterday. And a greater comfort still to know that she has you for a friend; one never feels safe somehow with a man like Sir Matthew Mactavish, but if she may turn to you in any difficulty I shall not worry half so much."

"I will promise you to be to her just what I would try to be to one of my own sisters," said Mrs. Hereford. "And you, too, must promise to treat us all as friends. Come in whenever you like, this week; you must make the most of your chance of seeing Evereld."

Macneillie in the meantime had been learning to know Ralph's future wife. He had been a little surprised at first to find that she was a decidedly reserved girl, not strikingly pretty, rather short, and wholly unlike the being he would have expected Ralph to fall in love with. This was, however, merely his first impression, he had not been two minutes in the room with her before he ob-

served how well her head was set on her shoulders; how in spite of her want of height there was that indescribable touch of dignity in her carriage which he had vainly tried to impart to many a novice on the stage. Then she spoke to him during a pause in the general talk, most of her talking he discovered was done to fill up gaps, and when she spoke a sort of transformation scene took place. Her face suddenly became lovely, the china-blue eyes seemed to radiate light and sweetness, the colour deepened in the softly-rounded cheeks and the most charming dimple made itself seen.

"We are all so much looking forward to 'The Winter's Tale' to night," she said.

"You have not seen Ralph act before?" asked Macneillie, knowing quite well what the answer would be but wishing for another variety of the transformation scene.

The blue eyes seemed to deepen in colour and an exquisite tenderness softened the whole face.

"Never on the stage," she said. "Of course I have seen him just as an amateur. Do you think he is getting on well?"

Now this last question was one to enthrall the heart of any Manager. Actually this girl did not leap to the conclusion that her lover was by nature a full-fledged actor, but asked if he was getting on.

"She is the most sensible little woman I ever came across," thought Macneillie to himself. "In such a case even Mrs. Siddons might have qualified her advice as to marriage."

By and bye Evereld found herself keeping guard over Baby Donal in the drawing-room and talking to Ralph, while Macneillie and Max Hereford adjourned to the smoking-room. The two lovers were serenely happy and saw the future opening before them in all the gorgeous hues of dawn. But Macneillie received a stab from his unconscious companion which was destined to rankle in

his heart. They had been speaking of Monkton Verney and not unnaturally Max Hereford, knowing that Christine Greville was a friend but knowing nothing of the true state of affairs, referred to her case.

"I only hope she will be able to get her divorce," he said casually, "but of course there is a doubt."

"A doubt?" said Macneillie frowning. "Why Sir Roderick never attempted to deny his guilt."

"Oh, yes, there is no doubt as to his guilt, and had she been married in Scotland all would have been well, for Scotland has one and the same law for men and women. Unluckily she was married in England."

"I don't understand you. I know little of the law," said Macneillie, "but certainly in my country there would be no difficulty when it was a clear case of the breach of the seventh commandment."

"There would be no difficulty in England for a man," said Max Hereford, "but a woman cannot get a divorce here unless she can prove cruelty as well as adultery on the part of her husband. It is only one of the instances of our scandalous habit of setting up different standards of morality for men and women."

"How much longer are the English going to put up with such a grave injustice?" said Macneillie.

"Not long, I fancy, when once they realise it. But at present half of them are ignorant of the true state of things, while the evil-minded are of course unwilling to rob themselves of what they regard as a prerogative. The law as it stands is not only unjust to women but to all moral men. How easily one can picture a case where, because divorce was not granted, it was impossible for the innocent woman to marry a man who loved her."

Macneillie assented quietly. No one could have guessed how terribly this suggestion moved him, how clearly he saw in his own mind the picture of an innocent woman and an upright law-abiding man with their lives wrecked by this double-standard of morality.

"I think," he said presently, "that at any rate in Miss Greville's case there will be little difficulty in proving Sir Roderick's cruelty."

"I hope it may be so," said Max Hereford, "but I understand from her solicitor that different views prevail as to what does exactly constitute legal cruelty. The case is not likely to come on yet for many months and the suspense must be terribly trying for her, far worse of course than for anyone in private life."

"Her decision to stay at Monkton Verney till the case is over seems to me wise," said Macneillie. "Your Cave of Adullam is a great Godsend. I wonder what made you think of such a plan."

"Oh, the 'cave' was my wife's doing," said Max Hereford. "Miss Claremont is delighted to have her old friend Miss Greville there, and since Barry Sterne has undertaken the entire management of her theatre there is no need for her to be troubled in any way about outside things. Why Flo, Kittie," he exclaimed breaking off as two pretty little girls darted into the room, their sunburnt faces aglow with eagerness.

"Daddy, there's a man with the beautifullest voice you ever heard and we want sixpence for him," they cried in a breath, "do come and hear him."

And by sheer force of determination the two small elves dragged their father from the depths of his easy chair.

"The tyranny of daughters is a thing you have yet to learn, Mr. Macneillie," he said with a smile, as with one elf on his shoulder and the other impetuously pulling at his hand he sauntered out to the front door.

Macneillie flung the end of his cigarette into the grate and began to pace the room restlessly. The words so unconsciously spoken seemed to put the finishing touch to his pain, the fatherly pride of his companion's face haunted him and filled him with envy, and over and over

in his mind he revolved the torturing doubt which had first been suggested to him that morning. Would the law free Christine?

Meanwhile through the open door there was wafted to him only too distinctly the familiar song of the street tenor:

> "Love once again: Meet me once again:
> Old love is waking, shall it wake in vain?"

Such a life as Macneillie's may have two very different effects on the man called upon to endure it. Either it will harden and embitter him, and he will gradually become a mere cynical observer of others; or it will deepen and widen his whole character, and he will become more and more tender towards the lives of other people. Lynx-eyed to detect and prompt to check as far as possible all that he deemed undesirable or in the least risky among the members of his company, he was nevertheless always kind-hearted with regard to any genuine attachment. He knew Ralph now very intimately and was quite well aware that his feeling for Evereld was no mere passing fancy. In his own grievous anxiety and suspense there was comfort in throwing himself into the affairs of his protégé, and a growing desire to see this love story happily worked out took possession of him. He had, moreover, taken a great fancy to Evereld, and began now to consider things from her point of view, trying to picture to himself just how she would probably feel with regard to Ralph's profession. She had never seen him on the stage, had never in fact seen him act at all since the time she had been of an age to understand what love meant. He wondered how the play that night would strike her. Would Florizel's love-making possibly jar a little upon her as she sat there watching it from her place in the stalls? Or would that gracious womanly wisdom which he had noticed in her save her from all petty jealousies, all thoughts unworthy

of a great art? He thought it would. Still a girl of nineteen in love with a man like Ralph Denmead might perchance be excused if she were not entirely able to forget herself and her own story in the contemplation of Shakspere's play.

"I know what I will do," he thought to himself. "No one who understands the training, the learning, the drilling, the matter of fact element of sheer hard work that makes up the life of an actor is likely to think stage love-making a dangerous pastime. I will persuade Mrs. Hereford to bring her this morning to rehearsal."

CHAPTER XXII

"If art be devoted to the increase of men's happiness, to the redemption of the oppressed, or enlargement of our sympathies with each other, or to such presentment of new and old truth about ourselves and our relation to the world as may ennoble and fortify us in our sojourn here, or immediately, as with Dante, to the glory of God, it will be also great art."—"Appreciations." WALTER PATER.

MRS. HEREFORD who had readily divined Macneillie's kindly intention in suggesting that they should see at any rate part of the rehearsal, wondered to herself whether his plan had been wise when about noon she found herself with Evereld and Bride in the dim dreariness of the theatre, which was quite empty save for a couple of charwomen who were scrubbing the floor of the pit. A civil attendant took them to the second row of the stalls where they had of course an excellent view of that inexpressibly dingy and forlorn looking place—a stage without scenery.

Macneillie wearing a Glengarry cap was sitting on a chair with his back to them directing the dialogue and criticising in his quiet voice the shortcomings of Paulina and Emilia in the prison scene. At the back of the stage, some pacing to and fro, some sitting on the floor, were the rest of the company chatting comfortably together in low tones.

"Do you think they are all Quakers?" observed Bride naughtily, "how queer it does look to see men indoors with their hats on, every variety too, bowlers, deerstalkers, sailors, and caps."

"Perhaps it's draughty on the stage," said Evereld. "I believe that tall dark girl must be Miss Myra Kay. She was only married last month. See Ralph is talking to her, that pretty girl in the blue and white blouse. She is Hermione I think."

"Don't distract me," said Bride. "Paulina is handling the stage baby very well, but it's too small a doll, why Flo who was the tiniest of babies was more respectable than that. Ah, Antigonous lifts it from the floor. My good man you'll break the child's neck if you don't support its head better. Talk about kites and ravens being instructed to nurse it, why he wants instruction himself. It's as bad as seeing a young curate at a christening."

Evereld was obliged to laugh a little, and her eyes were still bright and mirthful when suddenly she perceived Ralph emerging through a side door and approaching them.

"I thought you might like a book to follow with," he said. "Are you getting thoroughly dis-illusioned? And shall you never be able to enjoy seeing a play again, now that you know how it's done?"

"Indeed I shall enjoy it much more," she said. "Oh there is still a good deal I see, before you come in. Who is your Perdita?"

"The fair-haired girl in blue serge, Miss Eva Carton. She is the daughter of that Major Carton who was killed in the Soudan."

"I remember you had him in your gallery of heroes. Is she a nice girl?"

"Very, I think, but I have not seen much of her yet. They were left badly off and she has taken to the stage to help her mother. She has only just joined this company, so we are in the same box."

After this Evereld watched with keen interest the progress of the play. It seemed to her that Macneillie was almost an ideal instructor. His patience was marvellous and his criticism though sometimes keen was always kindly. When the sheep-shearing scene began and Florizel and Perdita with no helpful accessories had to go through their love-making, while the working of a sewing-machine and the hammering of carpenters and the

scrubbing of the charwomen could be plainly heard, Evereld realised more than she had ever done before the prosaic nature of some aspects of an actor's life. Macneillie was as fidgetty as any dancing master about the precise way in which his arm should encircle her waist. Degville himself could not have laid more stress on the importance of every attitude, and when it came to the part where Florizel claimed Perdita as his bride in the presence of the disguised Polixenes he was promptly pulled up in the utterance of the words: "I take thy hand, this hand, as soft as dove's down and as white as it."

"Don't take her hand as if you were taking a jam tart at a confectioner's," exclaimed Macneillie.

And over and over again that particular bit had to be rehearsed until it was precisely to the Manager's mind. Finally a diversion was made by the arrival, long after the time when they should have put in an appearance, of a few members of the orchestra. In a leisurely way, as though they were conferring a great favour on the actors, they began to tune up, the pretty dance of shepherds and shepherdesses was rehearsed, and Bride and Evereld found themselves longing to join in it.

"I really wonder," said Bride as they walked home, "that you dare to take me to such a beguiling place, Doreen. Don't you expect me to be stage-struck?"

"There might be some danger if you only saw the performances," said Mrs. Hereford laughing, "but I doubt if you would stand many rehearsals. You would certainly be fined every day for unpunctuality."

"It must be a weary grind," said Bride yawning. "One would have to love one's art very absorbingly to be able to endure such endless repetition. I suppose that is the difference between an artist and an ordinary mortal. An artist never grudges trouble, the dullest little touches here and there all have an interest for him."

"Certainly, if he is worth his salt," said Mrs. Hereford.

"That's what Flo will have to learn if she is to develop as I hope into a singer."

"Well," said Bride good-humouredly, "I have only just enough energy for ordinary life, so I will stick to being an ordinary mortal. And you keep me company, Evereld. We will make the appreciative audiences for the others. What is the fun of acting or singing if there is no one to applaud."

In fact she applauded much more heartily than Evereld that evening. Evereld's appreciation was pretty plainly visible in her glowing face and bright eyes, but she left the hand-clapping to her companion, and sat in a sort of happy dream watching the play contentedly with the blissful consciousness that every minute the time drew nearer when Ralph would make his appearance.

After the heavier portions of "The Winter's Tale," the pastoral scenes always come as a relief, and Ralph could hardly have had a more taking part. Evereld who at rehearsal had never been able to watch him except as her friend and lover was now entirely absorbed by the play. He was Florizel to her and Florizel only, he looked the part to perfection, and there was a sincerity about his acting which carried all before it, and gave great promise for his future. Macneillie standing at the wings felt more than content with his pupil.

"If the boy can do as well as this at one and twenty, he ought to have a great career before him," he thought to himself. "And perhaps like Phelps he will be one of those who will owe everything to an early and a happy marriage. That little girl is one of a thousand. It is to be hoped that Sir Matthew Mactavish will not step in to spoil the game."

The rest of the week passed by only too swiftly. Almost every evening they went to the theatre, and in the afternoon Ralph would often join them at tennis. One day there was a cricket match between the members of

the company and a local eleven, on another day a picnic to a ruined castle in the neighbourhood, and at length the doleful day arrived when the parting must come.

After all it proved to be the elders who were grave and anxious at the thought of the unknown future which Ralph and Evereld went forth to meet so confidently. Healthy youth is seldom troubled with forebodings, and the lovers though saddened for the time by the coming separation could not but reflect how much more propitious things were than at their last leave-taking.

"How I envied little Ivy Grant as she walked along Queen Anne's Gate with you that Christmas day," said Evereld with a smile. "Where shall you be this Christmas, Ralph?"

"We shall be in Yorkshire," he replied, "still giving the set of plays you have seen here. What a good thing it is for me that you can take such an interest in the work. It must be hard on an actor to do without the sympathy of those nearest to him. Sometimes one does wish that old Mrs. Macneillie had not such a feeling against the stage. His life is hard and lonely enough without having that added to it. Still I think they understand each other, and it is good to see her pride in him."

"Does she never see him act?" asked Evereld.

"Never. She won't set foot in a theatre; she is not even one of those people who only object to the name of the thing, and will see a play at the Crystal Palace or in a Hall. She's too sensible to take that view."

"Why what is the special merit of a 'Hall?'" asked Evereld laughing.

"Goodness only knows. I often wish those worthy but illogical folk could feel the discomforts and the woeful plight the company often find themselves in behind the scenes, with perhaps a couple of dressing-rooms for the whole lot of them, and no possible place in which to put

their clothes. They would soon realise the advantages of proper theatres."

"Have you seen your good notice in the Southbourne Weekly News?" said Evereld, glancing at the paper with loving pride.

"Yes. It's rather decent, isn't it? I always cut out and keep press notices for Mr. Macneillie. Sharing his lodgings there are a good many small things of that sort one can do for him."

"Who does the catering?"

"Oh, he does all that. He is a first-rate hand at marketing, having had so much practice."

"I shall have to come to him for lessons, some day," said Evereld, blushing vividly as she realised what the words involved.

Whereupon Ralph forgot all about fortunes and guardians and time and patience, and taking her in his arms kissed her passionately.

That was their real parting, or rather the silent pledge that nothing could really part them. Ralph lingered for some little time afterwards in the next room talking with the others, and as usual there was the cheerful Irish babel of many voices, for no one thought in that household of talking one at a time. Then having received a kindly invitation from Mrs. Hereford to come and see them either in London or at Hollybrack, he took his departure, and with the memory of Evereld's love to cheer him on his way, rejoined Macneillie's company at the station.

"That is a case I suppose," said Max Hereford finding himself just then alone with his wife.

"I thought you would guess it," she said smiling.

"You were always a matchmaker at heart, Doreen," he said teasingly. "But how about this guardian in the background? He will be playing the Assyrian and coming down on you like the wolf on the fold."

"I can't help it if he does," said Mrs. Hereford, laugh-

ter lurking in her eyes. "Really and truly I have not been match-making. It's ridiculous for Sir Matthew Mactavish to allow his ward to be brought up for six years with such a boy as that, and then to take me to task for allowing the two old friends to meet in a rational way. And after all if he is annoyed I believe I should rather like it, for you know Max I always did detest that man."

"Yes, dear, we all know that you are the best hater in the world, and I know that you are the best lover," he said stooping to kiss her.

"I don't see how I could have done otherwise," she said musingly. "Evidently Mr. Macneillie sees exactly how things are. And what can you do for a couple of homeless waifs like that but give them your help and sympathy? A girl with no mother is in such a wretched plight as soon as her love troubles begin. Don't I know exactly how my own mistakes and miseries came from that very cause? Tell me what you really think of Ralph Denmead?"

"I like him," said Max Hereford. "He seems an honest, straight-forward, clean-minded fellow, he has plenty of humour, too, in which perhaps Evereld is a trifle lacking, and just because he has a touch of the Welsh fire in him and is at times unreasonable and unpractical, as all Kelts are——"

"Now, now," exclaimed Mrs. Hereford with her irresistible laugh. "No dark hints about Kelts, we all know what that leads to."

"I was going to remark, if you won't quite throttle me," he continued suavely, "that marriages between Kelts and Saxons, though barbarously prohibited by the oppressive laws of the English conquerors when they annexed Ireland, always turn out eminently successful. That in fact the union of hearts is the thing to be aimed at."

"They are not actually betrothed yet, and won't be until she is of age, and until he has made his way a little. Then of course there will be a battle royal with the Mac-

tavish, but he will have no authority over her, and you and I, Max, will stand by her. She shall be married from Hollybrack quietly, and they will be able to live very comfortably for, according to Bride, she will be rich."

"I only hope her guardian is really trustworthy," said Max Hereford. "I don't altogether like what I heard of him the other day from old Marriott. But, of course, Marriott is one of those steady going old-fashioned solicitors who are excessively cautious, and it would be almost impossible for him to approve of a Company Promoter like Sir Matthew. He may be all right enough."

"We shall see," said Mrs. Hereford with an expressive little gesture of the hands. "For my part I wouldn't trust him for a moment, but you will say that is my Irish imagination, and of course I have no great knowledge of the man."

Bride O'Ryan, who had been more or less taken up with her own people during the past week, had guessed nothing at all as to what was going on. The two friends had both hitherto been somewhat young for their age, and they had never been the sort of girls given to premature talk as to lovers and love-making. Their heroes were either the patriots of the past or the great leaders of the present, and their school life had been too full of work and well-organised amusement to leave much time for desultory dreaming. Bride had of course heard of the life at the Mactavishs, but it had never entered her head that Ralph Denmead could ever be anything but Evereld's adopted brother.

It was not until he had actually gone that the truth began to dawn upon her. She saw that Evereld was making an effort at cheerfulness, that her face when in repose had a quite new expression of wistfulness, and that all at once she had grown dreamy and absent.

That night, when the mystic hour of "hair brushing" came round, she could hold her tongue no longer.

"I wish," she said impetuously, "you wouldn't shut me out of it all. I know quite well you are unhappy, though you will play the ostrich and bury your head in the sand in that English way, supposing that no one will notice you."

Evereld laughed at the old mixture of the similes.

"I never heard of an English ostrich," she said merrily. "If there ever was one it must long ago have become extinct like the Dodo."

"Ah, you laugh now," said Bride, "but you have looked wretched all the afternoon, and I saw you crying in church."

Evereld blushed guiltily.

"It was very stupid of me, but I couldn't help remembering how different all had been last Sunday evening."

"When Mr. Denmead was here," said Bride boldly.

Evereld nodded.

Bride looked straight into her soft blue eyes.

"Well I'm sure I don't wonder he lost his heart to you, but all the same I wish he hadn't."

"We are not engaged, you know," said Evereld.

"Oh, it's just as bad as if you were," said Bride despondently.

"As bad? What an odd way you have of congratulating me."

"I don't congratulate you. I'm very sorry," said Bride vigorously brushing her dark hair. "Why should he come disturbing us just when our life is beginning and we were going to have such a good time. You'll never be at all the same to me again. It will be as the poem says:

'One and one, with a shadowy third.'"

"Nonsense," said Evereld. "It has made me care for you fifty times more than I did, Bride, and I need you now more than ever. Besides, can't you see how different things are for me. You have your home with your sisters, and the children; and you have brothers often stay-

ing with you, and you are all sure of each other and everything is so happy that I'm sure I don't know how you could leave it all just yet. But I have no real home, and the only one of the Mactavishs I do really like is to be married in November. Can't you understand how beautiful it is to really belong to someone at last?"

"Yes," said Bride. "It was selfish of me to think first of my own part of it. And after all perhaps you are right, you may need me still. Specially when the Mactavishs are horrid. They won't like your engagement a bit."

"No," replied Evereld quietly. "That is very certain. There are storms ahead. But I shall know where to turn to. You will always be my friend, and Mrs. Hereford says I am to come to her in any trouble."

"Of course, Doreen mothers everybody, she always did, Michael says, even when she was quite a little girl herself."

"And no one will ever be such a friend to me as you, Bride. You and Aimée Magnay and I will always keep up with each other, whatever happens."

"Talking of Aimée reminds me that I heard from her this morning," said Bride. "She says that in September they are all going to Auvergne; her father has some commission for a picture. They will stay at Mabillon all the autumn and perhaps even for Christmas. Cousin Espérance thinks I had better come too for the sake of perfecting my French, but I'm not sure that I could leave Dermot."

"Take him with you," suggested Evereld. "The sunshine and the warmth down there would exactly suit him."

"Why, I never thought of that. It would be a splendid idea, and the Magnays are so kind-hearted. I know they have lots of room, too, in that rambling old château. Don't you remember the little picture of it that Aimée had in our bedroom at school? Come, after all things are not so dark. You will always be my friend in spite of

Mr. Denmead, and perhaps later on when you are engaged there will be a regular row and you will have to come to us."

"You look as if you quite longed for the row," said Evereld smiling wistfully. "I wish I had a little of the love of fighting which you Irish people seem to have such stores of. How would you face an angry guardian under the circumstances, I wonder."

"I should listen patiently to all his objections. Then I should say, 'Now hear my side of the case,' and if he wasn't convinced by my burning eloquence why I should inevitably lose my temper and we should part on the worst of terms. Oh, I should love to have a quarrel with Sir Matthew Mactavish. It's a pity we can't change places just for that time."

"Well, don't let us talk about it till it comes," said Evereld with a little shiver. "When I am quite my own mistress perhaps the mere fact of being independent will make me dislike the thought of the discussion less. After all, nothing will really matter when we are engaged; one will be too busy thinking of the life that will so soon begin."

They were interrupted by a knock at the door.

"I want that naughty little sister of mine," said Mrs. Hereford, looking in with a smiling face. "Mollie declares there is no getting her invalid to sleep while you two chatterboxes are overhead."

"Evil take the Coercion Act that made him an invalid," said Bride, gathering up her belongings and bidding her friend good-night.

Evereld, glancing at Mrs. Hereford, saw for the first time in her face an expression which startled her. A look of long endured pain, of heart-breaking disappointment and the wearily deferred hope which makes the heart sick, such a look as a martyr might have borne, dying in the darkest hour which heralded the sunrise of his cause.

And then even as she gazed the look passed and there was once more in the face nothing but cheerful, tender motherliness.

"Good night, dear little woman," said Mrs. Hereford. "Don't lie awake thinking too long. It is a shocking bad habit."

"Oh," cried Evereld, clinging with girlish devotion to her hostess. "I do so hope my love for Ralph will not make me grow narrow. I want to care for other people and for outside things just as you do."

"You must manage much better than I did, dear," said Mrs. Hereford, "perhaps after my own mistakes I may be able to help you."

CHAPTER XXIII

"He spoke of beauty: that the dull
Saw no divinity in grass,
Life in dead stones, or spirit in air;
Then looking as 'twere in a glass
He smooth'd his chin and sleek'd his hair
And said the earth was beautiful."

TENNYSON.

THE last week at Southbourne proved a very happy one and Evereld went back to London feeling as though a veil had been lifted from before her eyes. It was not only that love had revealed his face to her; but for the first time since her childish days in India she had known what life could mean in a thoroughly happy family.

The Mactavishs had never encouraged her in making friends. For reasons of his own Sir Matthew had never allowed her to become really intimate with any one in town, though she had had the usual round of children's parties and had occasionally been allowed to give a children's dance in the house in Queen Anne's Gate. At school, however, close friendships had naturally been made, and the permission to stay with Bride O'Ryan at Southbourne had been extorted from Sir Matthew rather reluctantly, and chiefly because it happened to be a little inconvenient to Lady Mactavish to have the charge of Evereld until they left for Switzerland.

It so happened that the whole course of the girl's life was affected by the mere fact that Lady Mactavish and her elder daughter had accepted an invitation to stay with friends in the country, and that Minnie had been busy with her trousseau, and, having a particular friend of her own staying with her, quite declined to be troubled with the society of a little girl fresh from school.

Sir Matthew not caring to vex his daughter when he

was so soon to lose her, answered Mrs. Hereford's second request graciously, little guessing that in so doing he was signing the death-warrant of his selfish hopes and schemes.

He beamed approvingly on Evereld when she appeared in the drawing-room on the evening of her return.

"Come, that is a refreshing sight for a jaded city man," he said, stroking her rosy cheek caressingly. "Never mind, Evereld, we are all going holiday-making now, and will forget all cares and troubles. Have you seen our route, my dear?"

"No," said Evereld, "I'm longing to see it."

She could not help reflecting that the months since the Easter holidays had wrought a very decided change in Sir Matthew, he looked worn and harassed, and as though he were longing for rest. He seemed, too, more fussy and dictatorial than ever, and Evereld's heart sank at the prospect of travelling with him, for she knew that travelling is the great test of character. After the merry talk and the bantering discussions and the hot but always good-tempered arguments to which she had grown accustomed during the last fortnight, the talk which prevailed on various vexed questions, seemed highly distasteful.

"I really think," pleaded Lady Mactavish, in her grumbling voice, "that considering how very soon Minnie's marriage will be following our return it would be most advisable to take at least one maid with us. There are so many little things Greenway could be getting forward with if she were at hand."

"Yes, Papa," urged the bride-elect. "It will be a most awful nuisance if we have no maid with us."

"If you think you will always have a maid, my dear, to dance attendance on you when you are married, you will find you are mistaken. The wife of an officer in a marching regiment has to learn to be independent, I assure you. And as to taking a maid to Switzerland I shall not hear of such a thing. You would find her a trouble

in the hotels, useless on the steamers, and upset by the long journeys. Why Evereld will be wanting to take her old nurse next!"

Evereld laughed, but in her heart she would fain have had Bridget with her, for she loved her a great deal better than any other member of the household.

The question was thoroughly threshed out, and many disagreeable things were said on both sides; then Sir Matthew laid down the law as to the size and amount of the luggage.

"No great trunks, mind you," he said in the voice that meant obedience at all costs; "a small portmanteau is all that can possibly be allowed. You don't go to Switzerland to air your fine clothes but to enjoy yourself, and there is no enjoyment possible if you are burdened with luggage."

A long wrangle followed upon this, and at the close of it, dinner being over, Lady Mactavish rose with an air of relief and went away to discuss the matter anew with her daughters, and to murmur over Sir Matthew's extraordinary fussiness.

"The heat must be affecting his brain," she said. "I never knew him so vexatious. What does he know about the clothes we shall require? And depend upon it he will be the first to complain if you look shabby. Evereld my dear, Sir Matthew is calling you I think. Run down and see."

Evereld returned to the dining-room where Sir Matthew was sitting over his wine.

"In case I don't see you to-morrow, my dear," he said, "I will give you this cheque now. Get it cashed in five pound notes, they will pass anywhere."

"Is this for my journey?" asked Evereld, who had never received a cheque for a hundred pounds in her life.

"No, no, I will manage all your money for you until you come of age. This is only for your dress and pocket

money. I shall give you another cheque to the same amount in six months' time. It will be well for you to learn the value of things and to get into the way of keeping accounts. By the bye, though I say so much about its not mattering what you wear in Switzerland you must be sure to take good strong boots. You know Mr. Bruce Wylie is coming with us?"

"Yes," said Evereld, "I'm very glad."

"Well, good-night, my dear. God bless you," said Sir Matthew. "Tell them I shall not be in till late."

Evereld having delivered her message, went slowly upstairs to the school-room, the most homelike place in the whole house. Here she found Bridget sitting by the open window with her knitting.

"My new life has begun, Bridget," she said, taking her usual place on her old nurse's lap. "Look, here is money, a heap of it. I am to go out and buy thick-soled boots to-morrow with it, and an account book. Bridget, did you ever keep accounts? And do you ever think it's allowable to cook them?"

"I can't say, dearie, I never kept any at all, excepting it was the savings bank book which the post office clerks keep for one."

"Sir Matthew says I must learn how to manage money and to understand the value of things," said Evereld. "So we will go out to-morrow morning, Bridget, together, and I shall choose you a black silk dress by way of learning."

"Why then, dearie, it's for your own dress and not for mine that you must be spending this upon," protested Bridget.

"It's to do what I like with, Nursie, and I like to get you the very nicest gown we can find," said Evereld.

"Well, well, dearie, you were always one to think of other folk first, and if you will be getting me a dress, let it be a black poplin for the sake of the old country."

So Bridget and her young mistress set forth the next morning and chose the best Irish poplin, warranted to wear for a life-time, and Evereld changed her cheque into twenty crisp five pound notes, eighteen of which Bridget securely sewed up for her that evening in an inner pocket.

"There's many things you may be wanting to buy if you come back through Paris," she said, "let alone its being a bad plan to leave the money behind you here."

Evereld sighed a little; it somehow hurt her to remember that she had all this money for her personal wants and fancies, while Ralph thought himself extremely lucky to be earning three pounds a week. She had, however, a shrewd suspicion that he perhaps found more satisfaction out of the money he had honestly worked for, and she eagerly looked forward to the time when they could share her fortune and make it of real use.

The next morning the whole house was in a bustle, and the atmosphere seemed less oppressive than on the previous night. Sir Matthew, though looking ill and harassed, brightened up when Evereld appeared ready dressed for the journey in a trim little navy blue coat and skirt, a light blue shirt and a dainty white sailor hat. She looked so fresh and innocent and happy that for the time he quite forgot his schemes in the pleasure of just looking at her.

It was not until they were on the platform at Victoria, and he saw Bruce Wylie approaching, that he remembered how necessary it was that by the time Evereld returned to London she should be safely betrothed to her solicitor. The thought made him glance critically at his friend. As it happened Bruce Wylie never showed to more advantage than at such a time as the present. His well cut grey travelling suit and knickerbockers made him appear much younger than he really was, his fair hair and trim beard, his merry grey eyes, his easy, pleasant manner were all in his favour.

"It will be right enough," reflected Sir Matthew,

"The girl will be properly in love with him long before the end of the tour."

He had no notion how differently people regard the same person when one looks from the standpoint of five-and-fifty and the other from the standpoint of nineteen.

Evereld saw merely the lawyer who had brought her chocolates when she was a little girl, she knew that he was at least nine-and-forty, and that from her point of view was elderly; the thirty years between them made a huge chasm which it would never have occurred to her to bridge over in any way but that of friendship. Even the friendship could not be the same sort of thing as that close friendship, that perfect understanding which comes between two people of the same generation. It would have had in it something of the position of master and pupil, which might have been delightful enough with some men, but she had never felt any desire to learn from Bruce Wylie. She liked him merely because he passed the time, because he had a fund of good stories and an easy natural way of telling them.

So when Sir Matthew complacently noticed the way in which her face lighted up as she greeted Bruce Wylie, he was wholly unable to guess that the reception meant about as much as a child's joyful greeting of the appearance of the clown in a pantomime. "Now we shall have some fun," reflected Evereld, gladly finding the new comer beside her in the railway carriage.

"I need have no scruples," reflected Sir Matthew. "She evidently likes him and encourages him."

Bruce Wylie was not so sure in his own heart how matters stood, for Evereld was almost too frank and open with him, it was perfectly impossible to flirt with her, she liked him in the most unabashed manner, just as she had done when she was a child of eleven. Her enjoyment of his talk was what it had been then, and he was quite without the power of kindling in her heart any deeper feeling.

Being a shrewd man he laid his plans warily, and worked patiently, never venturing to make actual love to her. At all costs he must avoid startling her, or making her draw back from that frank friendliness which was likely to prove so useful. But every day he was her special companion, and she could not help feeling grateful to him for the care he took of her, the pains he took to please her, and the real enjoyment which he managed to impart to what would otherwise have been rather a trying tour.

"Why do you hesitate longer," urged Sir Matthew, during their stay at Zermatt, "September is nearly half gone, we have but another fortnight abroad. Why not propose to the girl here?"

"Not yet, not yet," said Bruce Wylie, "I tell you, Mactavish, she has not a thought of anything of the kind. She treats me as if I were her grandfather."

"It seems to me that she is devoted to you," said Sir Matthew. "She has not a word to say to any of the young men in the hotel though they are ready enough to admire her. She deliberately avoids them, I have noticed her, and is hand and glove with you. What more would you have?"

"Oh, I will arrange it all before the end of the tour," said Bruce Wylie, "by hook or crook it must be done. Let me see; to-morrow we go to Glion for a fortnight. It is there that we must contrive the finale."

"If it were not such a serious matter," said Sir Matthew with a grim smile, "One could have a hearty laugh over the irony of fate. Here we are with an unconscious little slip of a girl and she holds everything in her hands. For if the difficulty as to her fortune becomes known, then a dozen other things will collapse shortly after. God bless my soul—it's awful to think of!"

"So much the more reason to play this part of the game warily," said Bruce Wylie. "It is like the story of the child's hand thrust into the leaking dam and saving the

country from the deluge that would otherwise have come about. I must capture Evereld's hand and hold it fast to save the general ruin; whether she likes it or not it will have to be done."

"And the girl cares for you, there will be no harm in it," said Sir Matthew suavely. "I tell you what, Wylie, at Glion we must gradually let people see that you are in love with her. That will be easy enough without alarming her. We will set some of the women folk clacking. And if Evereld's pride is once touched, if she feels that she has been gossiped about, that people see that she has encouraged you, and that she is a little compromised, why then we shall win easily enough. She will very readily be persuaded into an engagement, and we will take good care to have her married before the year is out."

"Very well," said Bruce Wylie. "At Glion we will advance to the next stage. It will be a more amusing one than the present, and will need skilful management. I must think things over. By the bye, she never mentions Ralph Denmead, her old playfellow. Have you lost sight of him?"

"She told me last Christmas that he was going most likely on some tour in Scotland. Here she comes, we will just ask her, but you need fear nothing in that quarter. It was just a natural childish friendship between the two. They know each other's faults too well to fall in love."

"I see that young Oxonian is persecuting her," observed Bruce Wylie, watching a sunburnt undergraduate who had taken to following Evereld about on all occasions. She did not seem to be at all responsive, and her face lighted up most satisfactorily when she perceived Sir Matthew, while her companion was visibly chagrined.

"Watching the afterglow?" said Sir Matthew, as they approached.

"It's hardly worth watching to-night," said the Oxonian sulkily, as he noticed the alacrity with which

Evereld moved towards Bruce Wylie. What the girl could see in this conceited fellow he could not imagine.

"We were just speaking of Ralph Denmead, Evereld," said Sir Matthew. "Have you heard of him lately?"

"Yes, I hear from him now and then, and I saw him not so very long ago," said Evereld. "He was with Macneillie's Company when they were at Southbourne." By a strong effort of self-control she kept both voice and manner perfectly calm and natural.

"You saw him act?"

"Yes, he seems getting on very well. The Herefords knew something of Mr. Macneillie and they breakfasted with us sometimes. He has been very kind to Ralph."

"Well I'm glad the boy has fallen on his feet," said Sir Matthew. "I suppose there was a touch of genius about him, but he was not the least fit for the Indian Civil Service. Are you staying at Zermatt much longer?" he added, turning to young Dick Lewisham who was still one of the group.

"I am leaving to-morrow," he replied, "and shall get on as far as Villeneuve, I think."

"Ah yes, a charming hotel there," said Sir Matthew, "and the lake in September is delightful."

Having comfortably disposed of Mr. Lewisham in this fashion he was far from pleased when on the morning after their arrival at Glion he encountered him in the garden of the Rigi Vaudois.

"It was so abominably hot down below," said Dick Lewisham cheerfully, "I was obliged to come on here."

"I should advise you to go on still higher to Mont Caux," said Sir Matthew. "It is a magnificent hotel up there."

"Thanks, but this is more handy, and I like the look of the place."

"You'll find it over-crowded," said Sir Matthew, "we should not have got rooms unless we had ordered them beforehand."

"You are a large party," said the Oxonian, making his way round to the main entrance.

"How that old buffer does detest me," he reflected. "I begin to think he is bent on marrying his pretty ward to that beast Wylie, and is afraid I shall spoil sport. A likely thing when she will give me nothing but snubs the moment I show a spark of sentiment. Is it possible though that such a girl can care for a regular man of the world thirty years older than herself? I'll never believe it. There's a mystery somewhere. I shall stay here and watch how things go."

Evereld greeted him pleasantly, but not at all warmly when she encountered him after table d' hôte. She could have liked him extremely if his attentions had been a little less overwhelming, or if she could have told him of Ralph. As it was, he frightened her, and she was too much of a novice to know the best way to steer her course. She invariably fled for refuge to her old friend, Bruce Wylie, little dreaming that by so doing she might confirm the gentle hints which Sir Matthew and Lady Mactavish began to drop cautiously among their acquaintance in the hotel.

People enjoy few things more during their idle holiday hours in a health resort than watching any little drama that may happen to be taking place before them.

Evereld with her sweet innocent face turning to the old friend of her childhood and apparently encouraging him in every way while she sedulously snubbed the young Oxonian, was a spectacle that greatly pleased and edified the English visitors at the Rigi Vaudois. It began to be rumoured that Mr. Lewisham was only running after her money, that Bruce Wylie saw it all plainly enough, but that he was practically sure that little Miss Ewart was attached to him. That in fact an engagement might be declared at any moment.

Something of this sort reached the ears of Dick Lew-

isham, and so angered him that he determined to find out the truth for himself.

It happened that there was a dance in the hotel that evening. He knew that Evereld would not refuse to dance with him, and having secured her as his partner for the first *pas de quatre*, he afterwards persuaded her to come out on to the terrace.

The garden was deserted, and Dick Lewisham plunged straight into the subject which was filling his mind. He was a very honest, outspoken sort of fellow, and he began to fancy that Evereld would not so openly encourage Bruce Wylie had she known that people were beginning to comment on it.

"Miss Ewart," he said abruptly. "These little English colonies are always hot-beds of gossip. And in this case the gossip I have just heard tends to explain your marked coldness to me. I think there is no need for me to tell you of my love—of——"

"Oh, stop, stop," said Evereld, "I can't let you say that. I tried so hard to show you that I couldn't care."

Her distress struck him speechless for a moment; instinctively they walked on to a more sheltered corner of the garden.

"It is true then—you already care for—this other."

"Yes," she faltered. "But no one knows, here, oh, how can you have guessed?"

"Why it is the talk of the hotel," said Dick Lewisham. "Every one sees that he cares for you and that you encourage him."

Her eyes dilated. For a moment she stared at him blankly, "What can you mean?" she cried. "He is in England, and no one here knows—no one must know."

"Everyone is saying that you and Mr. Wylie care for each other; if that is true I will trouble you no more."

"They are saying that!" she exclaimed. "How perfectly ridiculous of them!" and in the sudden revulsion of

feeling she burst out laughing. "Why I have known him since I was a little girl, and even then he seemed to me quite elderly. My chief reason for liking him as a friend is that he was always kind to Ralph as well as to me when we were children."

Then in a flash it all came back to Dick Lewisham; once more he stood in the grounds of the hotel at Zermatt watching the afterglow, and listening to what was more or less meaningless talk to him about a young actor named Ralph Denmead. It was somehow less hard to him to retire before an unknown rival; it was Bruce Wylie he so cordially detested. Moreover in having thus surprised Evereld Ewart's secret, his position had been changed whether he would or no, from that of lover to friend and protector. He knew what no one else in the place knew, and this gave him, in spite of his rejection, a sort of soothing sensation. His admiration for Evereld had been very genuine, but it had been the sort of love which strikes no very deep roots in the heart. He was now only chivalrously anxious to help her in any way he could.

"I will go away from the place at once if you would rather," he said, after a somewhat prolonged pause. "But you may trust me always to respect what you have told me."

"Then don't go," she said, giving him her hand. "I always knew I could like you as a friend if only you had understood how things were. I think I won't dance again to-night. We are to have a long excursion to-morrow. I will say good-night to you and run in."

"And if at any time I can serve you, be sure you remember me," said Dick Lewisham looking into the truthful blue eyes lifted to his.

"I will indeed," she said. "We only wait to be actually engaged till I am twenty-one. I wish the time would go faster."

Dick Lewisham escorted her back to the hotel, and then

lighting a cigarette returned once more to pace up and down the garden path they had just quitted. The night was sultry, every now and then he could see summer lightning playing about the peaks of the Savoy mountains on the other side of the lake. Still musing over his talk with Evereld he threw himself down on a sheltered garden seat which stood on a little lawn screened on all sides by bushes. From time to time he heard steps on the path just beyond, and caught curious scraps of conversation over which he smiled in a cynical fashion.

Now it was a woman's voice.

"Well, what you can see to admire in her I can't imagine, and her dress! why those sleeves might have come out of the ark. Oh you didn't notice them. How curious men are."

Next came a pair of lovers.

"Dearest!" said one voice.

"My own!" replied the other.

And Dick Lewisham cruelly coughed. After which dead silence reigned.

By and bye a mellow, manly voice startled him into keen attention; it was Bruce Wylie.

"I'll propose to her to-morrow whatever happens. You can give the others just a hint and they will keep out of the way. We must have matters settled before leaving Switzerland. If she refuses me——"

"Why then," said Sir Matthew Mactavish, "I shall step in with the authority of a guardian. We will have no nonsense about the matter. But she will not refuse you. She has too much good sense."

The voices died away in the distance. Dick Lewisham laughed long and silently.

"So that is your game, my fine friend! It is you who are after little Miss Ewart's money though you have had the slander set afloat that I was a fortune-hunter. Ho! ho!" he rubbed his hands with satisfaction, "how I

should like to see your face when that little blue-eyed girl rejects you. I'll at any rate stay on here to see you when you return."

He was loitering about at the cable railway station the next morning when Evereld and Janet Mactavish walked from the hotel to take their places in the down-going carriage.

"And where are you off to this morning?" he inquired.

"We are going to see the Gorge de Trient," said Evereld, "at least some of us are. You are going to sketch near that waterfall, are you not, Janet."

"Yes," said Janet, "but Major Gillot and Minnie and Mr. Wylie will be with you. Four makes a much better number and I want a quiet day."

Dick Lewisham laughed in his sleeve, he felt sure that Janet had been taken into the plot. Then with some compunction he glanced at Evereld's unsuspicious face; her manner to him was perfect, he felt glad to think that she trusted him, and wondered much in what fashion she would get through the excursion. It was hardly likely he feared to be a day of pleasure to her.

They were now joined by Minnie and her *fiancé*, and at the last moment Bruce Wylie walked coolly across the little platform and down the steps, taking his place just before the carriage slid down its steep incline.

"Oh be quick! take care!" said Evereld with a look of alarm; and Dick Lewisham turned away, musing over the words and the expression of the girl's face.

"Evidently she likes him very much as an old friend," he reflected. "I wonder how she will get on."

CHAPTER XXIV

"To hug the wealth ye cannot use,
And lack the riches all may gain,
O blind and wanting wit to choose,
Who house the chaff and burn the grain!
And still doth life with starry towers
Lure to the bright divine ascent!
Be yours the things ye would: be ours
The things that are more excellent."

WILLIAM WATSON.

"Come over to this side of the carriage," said Bruce Wylie as they took their places in the train at Territet, "you will get the best of the views this side."

Evereld had become quite used to his kindly little arrangements for her comfort, she felt sure in her own mind that any good-natured man would have done as much for a girl on her first Swiss tour, and she smiled to herself at that ridiculous report which Mr. Lewisham had quoted to her. After all, though, was it not very likely that she herself had misjudged other people in exactly the same way? She was always making little romances in her mind about the people they met in the hotels, and they generally proved to be wrong when closer acquaintance revealed the truth.

She felt perfectly happy that September morning as they journeyed along the lovely lake, past the red roofed Castle of Chillon, past the white peaks of the Dent du Midi to St. Maurice, and then on once more through the somewhat trying heat of the Rhone Valley to Vernayaz.

"I shall be quite independent of you," said Janet, "and shall spend my day sketching. We will all meet here again in time for the train."

"Oh we must come and see you settled," said Bruce Wylie, "besides Evereld ought to see the waterfall nearer than from the train. We have our whole day before us, there is no hurry."

In the end these three walked off together in the direction of the Pissevache, while the two lovers went in the opposite direction, promising to order luncheon at the hotel.

Evereld seemed more talkative than usual, but when, having duly inspected the waterfall, he tried hard to draw her into the region of sentiment, she seemed more provokingly matter of fact than ever.

"It's very sad to think we have only one more excursion before we go home," he remarked, "how detestable England will seem after this holiday."

"Do you think so," said Evereld, "why I am longing to get back to England. Lovely as this place is, it seems so dreadfully far away."

"Far away from what?" said Bruce Wylie.

"Well, from one's friends and belongings," said Evereld.

Bruce Wylie could only pretend to be deeply offended.

"You say that to me," he said tragically, "one of your oldest friends!"

She laughed merrily.

"It was certainly a case of what *Punch* would call 'Things one would rather have expressed differently.' But though the tour has been a great treat I believe I should always begin to be homesick for England at the end of six weeks."

"Oh if it is only an abstraction like England I will not be jealous, it isn't worth while," said her companion with a laugh.

And Evereld blushed a little, knowing that it was not England in the abstract, but nearness to Ralph that she longed for.

Bruce Wylie saw the blush and was pleased. He entirely misunderstood it, and might have proposed to her at that very minute, had not some very dirty little children besieged them just then with the usual request for money.

The straggling street of Vernayaz was not the place for a private conversation, he would wait till later in the day.

After a merry lunch at the hotel with Minnie and Major Gillot they all went together to see the Gorge de Trient, and here he contrived to fall behind on the pretext of pointing out some particularly striking effect to Evereld as they threaded their way through the awful ravine with its foaming white torrent and its towering heights above.

But his effort was useless, for something in the majesty of this great rock, cleft so strangely, had filled Evereld with awe; she was thinking her own thoughts and was quite unresponsive to all his attempts to draw her into conversation.

"It feels like a church," she said once as they paused for a few minutes, and Bruce Wylie anxious not to jar upon her in any way, relapsed into silence.

Emerging at length from the cool shade of the Gorge de Trient, they returned to the hotel, Major Gillot ordered coffee, and Bruce Wylie took the opportunity to draw him aside and suggest a change of programme.

"Sir Matthew gave me leave to take Evereld on to Finshauts if she liked the idea," he said. "Let us all meet at the station. But don't wait for us if we chance to be late. Lady Mactavish might be anxious. I will bring her on by the next train in any case."

"All right," said the Major, paying no very great heed to the words, and well pleased to be left with Minnie for the rest of the time.

"Evereld," said Bruce Wylie, rejoining the ladies, "I don't know what you will say to the notion, but it seems to me very hot down in this place, and we have still some hours before us. I find there is a most beautiful drive to a place called Finshauts up in the mountains, with a very fine view of Mont Blanc. Shall you and I make a pilgrimage up there and leave Miss Mactavish and Major Gillot to enjoy this garden in peace?"

"I think it would be lovely," said Evereld, her eyes

lighting up. "I have been longing to get to the top ever since we came here."

Bruce Wylie was pleased that she should fall in with the idea, and went off at once to order a carriage, but perhaps her delighted acquiescence troubled him a little, for he made several attempts to justify his scheme to his own conscience.

"If she accepts me I shall take care to be in good time for the train, and all will be well," he argued. "And she will accept me in all probability after a little persuasion. If not, there is nothing for it but Sir Matthew's plan of scaring her with the fear of what people will say. No real harm will be done, none whatever. We shall merely play a little upon her credulity and ignorance and her proper pride, and all the rest of it. The game is worth the candle, for without her, sooner or later we shall be ruined."

He was more considerate and gentle in manner than ever when at length they set off together on their drive to Finshauts; her perfect confidence in him gave him an uncomfortable sensation, he kept on deferring the speech which must be made, and allowed her to enjoy to the full the beauty of the winding road with its shady groves of walnut and chestnut trees, and its wonderful glimpses of the Rhone Valley. They paused after a time to see the Falls of Emaney, and when they once more got into the carriage, Bruce Wylie made up his mind that before the next stage was reached his work must somehow be done. He looked down into her glowing happy face.

"You are enjoying it?" he said kindly.

"Oh more than I can tell you," she said. "It is quite the best drive we have had. What a pity Janet isn't here."

"For once you must let me be selfish," said Bruce Wylie laughing. "I am heartily glad she is not here. 'Two is company, three is trumpery,' as the proverb says."

"I never agree with that proverb," said Evereld. "We had a three-cornered friendship at school and it was delightful."

"For school friends it may be well enough. But I am something more than your friend, Evereld, I am your lover."

The assertion struck her dumb for a minute.

"Surely you had realised that?" said Bruce Wylie. "You must, I think, have known it all these weeks that we have been together."

"Oh, no, no," she cried in distress. "I never dreamt of such a thing. Please never say that again."

"But I must say it again. I want to make you understand me. For years I have hoped that you would some day be my wife. And when you understand me better I think you will say 'yes,' Evereld."

"No," she said desperately, "I can never say it. I could never care for you in that way. Please let us just be friends as we used to be."

"But things are altered now, you are no longer a child, but a woman. Believe me, dear, I would make you very happy. You perhaps think that the difference in our age is a drawback. But some of the happiest marriages I have known have been marriages of that sort. One can't make a hard and fast rule as to age."

"It is not that," said Evereld. "That might not matter a bit. But I could never love you."

"I will take my chance of that. The love would grow."

"No, it never could. . . . Please believe me and say no more. I can't think what makes you wish it when you must have met so many much more fit."

"But I have been waiting and hoping for you. And you must at any rate promise me to think it over for a few days before quite deciding. I have taken you by surprise. Think it over quietly, and we will talk about it some other day."

"If I thought for years it would make no difference," said Evereld.

"You fancy so, because like all young girls you have

made a sort of ideal in your own mind, and no living man can come up to that ideal."

She shook her head.

"No, not an ideal," she said softly, and into her eyes there stole the soft love light which revealed all too clearly her thoughts.

"She cares for some one else," reflected Bruce Wylie, "I suppose it's that confounded young Denmead. Well, silence is golden. She must be left till to-morrow to reflect."

"Dear child," he said in his mellow voice. "Don't look so grave. I will say no more just at present. I only ask you to give what I have said your careful thought. Here we are at Triquent."

Evereld drew out her watch, but in the worry of the previous evening, after her talk with Mr. Lewisham, she had forgotten to wind it up—the hands pointed to four o'clock.

"My watch has stopped," she said, "but surely it is time we turned back! Finshauts seems much further than I expected."

"Oh, we shall soon be there now," said Bruce Wylie, glancing at the time. "It takes us some while to climb up, but we shall rattle down again at a great pace."

It seemed a pity to have come so far and not after all to see the view of Mont Blanc, and though Evereld longed to be back with the others, and dreaded the *tête-à-tête* with her companion after what had passed, she scarcely liked to say any more about returning.

She was grateful to him, moreover, because on the last stage of the journey he got out and walked beside the driver, leaving her to her great relief unmolested.

"He is a wonderfully kind man," she reflected. "I hope I wasn't too emphatic, but one had to make him quite understand. Even now we shall have to talk it over again. Oh dear! Oh dear! how I wish Ralph and I

were really engaged, then one wouldn't be so tongue-tied. I shall only be twenty in the spring, and there will still be a year to wait."

The road passed now through a wood, and something in its green depths of shade made her think of a wood near Southbourne where they had once spent a happy mid-term holiday with the Herefords, during her school days.

"How I wish I were at school again now," she thought sadly. "It was all so happy and easy there, with none of these worries and misunderstandings. And yet I don't either, for if I were still at school Ralph would not have spoken to me that Sunday, that wonderful Sunday."

She fell into a happy dream, and was startled when Bruce Wylie suddenly appeared at the carriage door and resumed his place beside her.

"She was thinking of that boy," he reflected with annoyance. "This business will make our task even more disagreeable."

"You look tired," he said, "when we reach the Hotel Bel Oiseau I will order some tea to be got ready while we go on to the best point of view."

"But are you sure we shall have time. We must not miss that train," said Evereld.

"Oh, plenty of time. It's all down hill going back, and besides the horse must rest, and the driver will certainly expect to drink our health in the *vin du pays*."

His manner set her mind at rest, and indeed for a time she forgot all else in the wonderful panorama that opened out before them as Mont Blanc and the Chamounix Valley came into view. It was a scene to remember for a life-time, and Evereld, with her young heart and her clear conscience, was able to revel in its beauty, and to cast off altogether all petty cares and vexations.

These, however, returned when they went back to the Hotel Bel Oiseau; a mistake had been made—or so Bruce Wylie told her—as to the tea, and it took a long time in

coming. Then there was yet another delay because the coachman had mysteriously disappeared, and when at last the horse was put in and they turned back to Vernayez, Evereld was certain that they had allowed very scanty time for the descent.

"It's as much as we shall do to catch this train," remarked her companion, as they at length gained the valley.

"There is a train now just passing," exclaimed Evereld.

"Not ours, I daresay," said Bruce Wylie, "no," looking at his watch reassuringly, "it's not due for another ten minutes. We shall do it all right, don't be anxious."

"There, we are punctual to the minute," he remarked, as they drew up at the station, "and no train is here. Ha! what's that you say?" he added, as an old porter came leisurely up to them. "The train gone? Why, it's only now due."

The porter explained, with many gesticulations, that the Monsieur's watch was ten minutes slow.

"How annoying," said Bruce Wylie, "when is the next train for St. Maurice and Territet?"

"There are no more this evening, monsieur," said the porter. "Monsieur will find many good hotels in Vernayez."

Bruce Wylie made a well feigned ejaculation of annoyance.

"The others will have seen that we were not there," said Evereld, springing out of the carriage, "I will run and look for Janet;" but she returned forlornly in a minute, for Janet was not there.

"I think she might have waited," said the girl, indignantly.

"Oh, they would naturally conclude we should come on by a later train as we didn't turn up till this one started," said Bruce Wylie, "in fact I told the Major we should do that if by any ill fortune we were too late. Who

could have guessed that there were no trains later than this?"

"You looked out the trains yourself yesterday," said Evereld, "I should have thought you would have noticed."

She felt intensely irritated, it was one of those times when a traveller's temper is put to the test.

Bruce Wylie did not mend matters by his rather stumbling apology. She could not have explained her feeling, but somehow at that moment she felt that she could no longer put confidence in him.

"Well, I wouldn't have had such a thing happen for the world," he said. "It is all my fault, and I'm extremely sorry. The only thing to be done is to go back to the Hotel Gorge du Trient. We shall be in time for dinner, I daresay. To the Hotel, driver!"

"Wait," said Evereld quietly. "I must first send a telegram to Lady Mactavish explaining things."

"Quite right, of course. I ought to have thought of it. What a sensible little woman you are, Evereld."

She neither smiled nor responded in any way. A few hours before the episode would have troubled her very little, but to be stranded in this place with the man she had just refused was a situation she disliked very much. Behind it all, too, there lurked a vague feeling that she had been entrapped into the drive, that perhaps even Janet had guessed what Mr. Wylie meant to say during the course of this ill-fated expedition.

To do him justice, Bruce Wylie took good care to set her perfectly at her ease directly they arrived at the hotel, himself saw the manageress and explained things to her, handing over Evereld to her kindly care, and promising to meet her in the salon.

The Swiss manageress gave her a pleasant room, and lent her all that she needed, and when she went down to the salon a delightful surprise awaited her.

"Why, Evereld!" said a familiar voice, and a tall, pretty looking girl stepped forward with a warm greeting.

It was May Coniston, an old schoolfellow who had left Southbourne at Easter, and had come out to Switzerland for rest after the toils of her first London season. She introduced Evereld to her mother, and they listened to her description of the contretemps that had befallen her, and Evereld introduced Mr. Wylie to them.

"It is most fortunate you just happened to come across us," said May Coniston cheerfully. "I can lend you everything, and mother will be only too delighted to take care of you. There is nothing she enjoys so much as looking after girls."

So in the end Evereld had an extremely pleasant evening, lost her heart to kindly Mrs. Coniston, sat up hair-brushing with her friend till after midnight, and was delighted to have May for a companion in her large, lonely bedroom where, as Mrs. Coniston remarked, they could fancy themselves back at school once more.

Early the next morning, having parted with the Conistons, who were going to Champéry, Bruce Wylie and Evereld returned to Glion, arriving just in time for lunch. They encountered Janet and Minnie in the entrance hall, and Evereld went straight to the *salle à manger* with them, laughing over the events of the previous day, and remonstrating with them for having deserted her.

"We all got into the train when it came up," explained Janet calmly, "hoping to the last that you would come before it started; it must have been some minutes in the station. Mamma was vexed with us for coming on, but of course we all knew you were safe; your telegram got here before we did."

"Where is Lady Mactavish?" asked Evereld.

"She has gone down to Montreux to lunch with Lady Mount Pleasant, who by the bye has invited us all to go to-morrow to her picnic at a place near the Rochers de Naye."

Just at that moment Sir Matthew and Mr. Bruce Wylie joined them. There was something unusual in her guardian's manner, and Evereld wondered what had brought the cloud to his brow. It did not disappear at all when he greeted her, and had it not been for a talkative German doctor, who conversed learnedly with Janet, their party would have been an uncomfortably silent one throughout the meal.

"I want a few words with you, my dear," said Sir Matthew, when at last lunch was over. "Come with me to our own sitting-room. We shall not be interrupted there."

Evereld's heart sank.

"Mr. Wylie has told of his proposal to me," she reflected. "And Sir Matthew is vexed with me for refusing his friend."

"Sit down," said Sir Matthew, motioning her to a sofa beside the window, and wheeling up a ponderous armchair for himself. "I have, of course, heard from Mr. Wylie of your very surprising behaviour yesterday. Are you aware that you have refused one of the best and cleverest of men, a man too who has been encouraged by you for the last month."

"Oh, no," cried Evereld. "Indeed I never dreamt of encouraging him. How could I be supposed to think of a man thirty years older than I am as a lover?"

"I don't know what you thought about it, my dear, but you did distinctly encourage him. And everyone here, and at Zermatt, too, I believe, considered it a case."

"I am very sorry if they thought so, but it was a ridiculous mistake. I should never dream of marrying Mr. Wylie. He is just a friend and nothing more."

"I have no patience with this foolish talk about friends," said Sir Matthew. "You ought to know enough of the world to realise that it never puts faith in friendships between men and women."

"Can I not be friends with an elderly man like that? a

man of nearly fifty, who has known me since I was a child?" said Evereld questioningly.

"No, you cannot," said Sir Matthew decidedly. "You have encouraged him all these weeks, and you must marry him."

The tone of decision would, he thought, at once silence this gentle little girl with her innocent blue eyes. He received an uncomfortable shock when she quietly replied:

"Of course, if it is really so I can avoid Mr. Wylie in future. But marry him I will not."

"What possible objection can you have to him?" said her guardian irritably. "I can tell you, he is a man that most girls would be proud to accept."

"But I do not love him," said Evereld.

"Oh, you have been reading novels and have set up some absurd ideal hero unlike any man who ever existed. Bruce Wylie is one of a thousand, he will make you perfectly happy, and will save you from the infinite misery of being run after for the sake of your fortune by unworthy men embarrassed by debts."

Evereld laughed a little. "I will promise never to marry an unworthy man embarrassed by debts. But nothing will make me marry Mr. Wylie."

"Then it only remains for me," said Sir Matthew, "to tell you how things really are. You must marry him, my dear. The whole place is talking about you. Your reputation is at stake. Everyone knows that you were stranded alone with him last night at Vernayez, and there is only one way to prevent a scandal arising. You must be engaged to him at once, and you shall be married when we go back to London. If you like it might be on the same day that Minnie is married."

Evereld's eyes dilated.

"I don't understand you," she said. "Can you really mean that because Mr. Wylie very carelessly allowed us to miss the train, and didn't know—or—or pretended not

to know that it was the last train—that I should marry him because of that?"

"Dear child, you are very young and innocent, and the world is a hard censorious place. The busy tongues of these holiday idlers will certainly make free with your name. And I can't permit that. The best way to avoid scandal, the only way, is to hasten on your marriage."

"Very well," said Evereld. "But it is not Mr. Wylie that I shall marry."

"Do you dare to tell me that you are engaged to any one else?" said Sir Matthew.

"No, I am certainly not engaged," said Evereld. "But as soon a I come of age I shall be engaged."

"To whom." said Sir Matthew.

"To Ralph," she said, a vivid blush dyeing her cheeks.

With an inarticulate exclamation of wrath, Sir Matthew began to pace to and fro.

"This comes of adopting beggars," he said between his teeth. At that, Evereld started to her feet, and would have left the room had he not intercepted her.

"How long has this been going on?" he said, angrily.

"I never knew I cared for him like that until he had gone away more than a year ago, when you brought down the news about his examination."

"Just like the ungrateful fellow," said Sir Matthew. "As soon as he saw that there was nothing more to be got out of me, he thought to feather his nest with your fortune."

Evereld struggled hard not to lose control over her temper, but every pulse in her throbbed indignantly at the words.

"I think," she said in a low voice, "that money is the last thing any Denmead ever troubled himself to think of."

The words were so true that for a moment they checked Sir Matthew; he reflected wrathfully that his own action

in turning Ralph out of his house somewhat harshly had brought about this result he so little desired. Up to that time the friendship between the two had been of a most brotherly and sisterly character. He was startled from this train of thought by a sudden and wholly unexpected question from Evereld.

"My father used to say every penny he had was invested in railways—is my money still as he left it?" she inquired.

"W—w—w—we have made a few changes; you will learn all details when you come of age," said Sir Matthew.

Evereld had quick perceptions. She had never heard her guardian stammer before. She looked him through and through with her clear eyes, and knew that something was amiss. He coloured under her scrutiny, and complaining of the heat of the room, pushed the window wider open.

"Ralph has good points," he said, returning to the former topic. "But depend upon it, my dear, this is an idle fancy of yours; he will fall in love with some actress and forget all about you. It is only natural that it should be so."

Evereld shook her head.

"No," she said. "He will wait for me, and when he has got on a little in his profession, we shall be engaged. We might have been engaged now only he was too honourable."

"You talk just as one might expect an innocent girl fresh from school to talk, my dear," said Sir Matthew. "But it will not do. Such a marriage would be preposterous, your father would never have allowed it, and I once more repeat that acting in your interests I shall insist on your accepting Mr. Wylie's offer. You think me unkind; believe me," he took her hand and patted it caressingly, "I am not unkind, I am only making you do what is the best possible thing under the circumstances. You must

trust me. There are elements in the case you cannot understand. There is no safe path for a woman but the part of obedience to authority. You must be guided by me, my dear, you must recollect that in all the years you have lived under my roof I have always shown you kindness and love, and you must try to believe that I show that kindness now, though I thwart your wishes and wed you to a man who does not exactly fit in with your girlish and romantic ideal. We will say no more now, you are tired and agitated. But within the next two days I shall expect to receive from Mr. Wylie the news that his offer has been accepted. Think it quietly over. I am convinced that some day you will thank me for what I have done; ay! and other people will have good cause to thank me, too."

He stooped and kissed her on the forehead and politely opened the door for her in token that the interview was at an end.

Without a word Evereld left the room and went slowly upstairs.

CHAPTER XXV

" The tissue of the Life to be
We weave with colours all our own,
And in the field of destiny
We reap as we have sown."
WHITTIER.

THE broad staircase was covered with cocoa-nut matting, she toiled up the slippery steps feeling dazed and giddy, groping her way more by instinct than by sight to her own door. Her room was at the side of the hotel, and its French window, opening on to a little balcony, looked out over the woods of Veytaux and the distant turrets of Chillon to the Dent du Midi. She threw herself down now into the depths of an armchair, letting the soft air play on her hot cheeks, and staring out in a bewildered way at the lovely view which contrasted so strangely with her misery.

Her whole world seemed to be shaken to its foundation. Her instinct warned her that the guardian, whose plausible talk and apparent kindliness had long deceived her, was in no sense a man to be trusted. And seizing the clue, which his own accusations of others had furnished her with, she began to wonder if in some unaccountable way Bruce Wylie himself was one of those fortune-hunters, who finding themselves in difficulties sought to repair their losses with some heiress' money. Her clear insight had at once detected the false ring in his apologies about the lost train on the previous day. He had somehow forfeited her confidence, and the more she thought over her interview with Sir Matthew, and the extraordinary determination he had evidently made to marry her to his friend, the more she distrusted and dreaded them both. It might possibly

be that they had mismanaged her affairs, and were perhaps speculating with her money. She had heard of many cases where luckless women had been ruined by a fraudulent trustee.

Fortunately, though young and innocent, Evereld had been wisely educated, and even in all the agitation of the moment she was able clearly to see how foolish was the notion that in order to quiet unkind tongues, or to satisfy the outraged feelings of Mrs. Grundy, she should consent publicly to perjure herself, by vowing to love as a wife a man she did not desire to marry.

Sir Matthew and Bruce Wylie had fancied that a pure-minded, proud girl would easily be frightened into a marriage which in many respects was outwardly desirable. Women were seldom logical, and a little novice like Evereld could, they felt sure, be cajoled or scared or flattered into obedience to their wishes. Sir Matthew had reserved his direct command and the allusion to his authority as a guardian as his trump card. He thought because she had made no reply to this speech that he had convinced her. But Evereld knew that obedience to the truth must always stand before obedience to any authority, and she was emphatically not one of those plastic, weak-minded girls who furnish victims for the modern marriage market, and allow themselves to be sacrificed to the ambition of their parents.

There was, however, a sort of blind terror in her mind. She had read that pathetic novel "Jasmine Leigh," the plot of which turned on the forcible abduction of an heiress; and now, perhaps, not unnaturally the story returned to haunt her. Words which Ralph had spoken as to Sir Matthew's unscrupulous character, his utter disregard for the victims whose ruin followed the triumphal procession of his own fame and fortune, haunted her, too. She had thought him hard and uncharitable when he had spoken of his godfather, but his words had impressed her never-

theless, and she felt that they were probably not far from the truth. Like some trapped animal, she tried desperately to think what possible course she could take. If only that motherly Mrs. Coniston had been in the hotel she would have told her all and asked her advice, but she could hardly put the case in a letter, or travel to Champéry to see her. And there was no one else to whom she could turn, unless it was Mr. Lewisham, and she doubted if that would be a wise thing to do. Only a woman could thoroughly understand and help her.

And then the old grief of eight years ago, to which she had grown more or less accustomed, came back to her with an intensity of bitterness, a new realisation of irreparable loss. "Oh Mother!" she sobbed. "Oh Mother! Mother!"

A step on the balcony made her hastily try to check her tears. Minnie's room was next to hers, and the window also opened on to the little side balcony.

"Why Evereld," said a cheerful voice. "You dear little goose! Don't cry. I know all about it. Papa has told me. Don't you be frightened. It won't be half so bad as you expect. You'll soon grow very fond of Mr. Wylie. And you shall have such a pretty wedding dress and as many of your school friends as you like for bridesmaids. You have no idea what fun you will have choosing your *trousseau*. We will stop in Paris on our way home, and I can put you up to all sorts of things."

"Don't talk like that," said Evereld, her tears raining down, as the utter mockery of it all forced itself upon her.

"Do you think," continued Minnie, "that you are the first girl who has been obliged to give up an early love? Why it's my firm conviction that no one ever does marry a first love. If Papa had allowed it I should have married a lanky curate, and we should still be waiting for the inevitable country living which might or might not turn up. He put a stop to it all. And I cried my eyes out just as

you are doing. But I am very much obliged to him now and mean to be very happy with Major Gillot. Now stop crying, and I will make some tea in my etna, and later on you shall come out with us and do 'gooseberry.'"

"I'm afraid of meeting Mr. Wylie," objected Evereld.

"Indeed I think you had better not meet him with your eyes as red as that," said Minnie with a laugh. "There's no need for you to see him till dinner-time, for he has gone down to Montreux to talk over the arrangements for to-morrow with Mamma and Lady Mount Pleasant."

There was something comforting in Minnie's kindly manner, though Evereld vehemently dissented in her own mind from all her arguments. She obeyed her, however, and stopped crying, and even found temporary comfort in the afternoon tea which has a way of tasting so supremely good when made by oneself abroad. Later on they walked down the Gorge de Chaudron, where already the trees were arraying themselves in the lovely tints of early autumn. The two lovers walked a little ahead. Evereld followed slowly and thoughtfully, regaining her habitual strength and quietness of mind as she walked, by slow degrees. There was something in her face which puzzled Bruce Wylie when he met her again that evening at dinner. She looked older, even he could have fancied thinner, since the morning. He left her unmolested till the meal was over, but joined her directly afterwards in the entrance hall, where in the evening people were wont to lounge and chat unceremoniously. He was discussing thought-reading with a young American girl and skilfully inveigled Evereld into the conversation. In old times she had always felt an interest in experiments of this sort; to-night she felt that not for the world would she permit Bruce Wylie to touch her.

"Let us show Miss Upton the experiment we tried at Zermatt," said Bruce Wylie. "It was a brilliant success there."

"I would rather not to-night," said Evereld colouring. "I am tired."

"Oh, try just once," he said persuasively.

But she shook her head.

"I must appeal to your guardian," he said, laughing. "Sir Matthew, we want you to persuade your ward to do the pin-finding trick."

Rightly or wrongly, Evereld was convinced that if she now yielded her mind up to him he might abuse his power over her and weaken her resistance to his other wishes. She stood at bay conscious that many eyes were turned upon her, determined not to yield, yet puzzled as to how she was to proceed.

"Why Evereld, dear," said Sir Matthew in his hearty penetrating voice, "of course you will oblige us all. You are a capital hand at this sort of thing."

She turned to the pretty American girl, feeling that her only chance was to appeal to her. She seemed a clever, observant girl, surely she could be made to understand without words.

"I am so sorry," she said, "to be obliged to say 'no' to-night. But I am tired and am going up to bed. Won't you try the thought-reading?" Her clear blue eyes looked straight into the bright eyes of little Miss Upton, saying as plainly as eyes could express the thought, "Help me out of this dilemma." And the American responded instantly to the appeal.

"I guess I'll try whether I can't do it myself, Mr. Wylie," she said, looking up at him archly and holding out a dainty handkerchief. "Blindfold me instead of Miss Ewart, and see if I'm not just as sharp at finding the pin."

She made such fun of the whole process that even Bruce Wylie himself failed to notice that Evereld calmly walked up the broad staircase in sight of them all, and she was safely locked into her room before any one had bestowed a thought upon her absence.

"I shall always love American girls!" she said to herself. "How quick she was to understand, I only wish I could thank her, but that's impossible. Somehow I must get away from this place. I daren't stay longer. If only I knew how best to escape and where to go to! There is Mrs. Hereford. She would take care of me. But Ireland is so far away, and I fear they would overtake me before I could get to her. Shall I go to London and make Bridget take me away to some quiet little country place where no one could hear of us? Or there is Southbourne, but term will not begin till next week, and the whole house would be deserted, it would be no use going there." None of these plans seemed very promising. To whom could she turn?

Restlessly pacing up and down her room, she prayed for guidance, and almost immediately a well-known name floated into her mind. "Why!" she exclaimed, "I wonder I never thought of that before."

She stepped out on to the balcony, entered Minnie's room, took from the table a continental Bradshaw, and returning once more, sat down resolutely to puzzle out a route as well as she could. It was no easy matter for one unversed in the mysteries of railway guides; she found herself terribly baffled by two places with almost exactly similar names, and she floundered long in that wilderness of day trains and night trains, and dark and light figures, which prove traps for the inexperienced. If so much had not depended upon it she could have laughed over her perplexities, but as it was she came perilously near to crying over the Bradshaw, and nothing but dread of Bruce Wylie and the thought of Ralph enabled her to plod on until at last she had puzzled out her way of escape. The trains were not so favourable to her plans as she had hoped. It was impossible to leave till the middle of the next morning, and the journey would involve four or five changes of trains, and a night at a hotel. It seemed impossible to go straight through to her destination.

"If I go to a hotel," she reflected, "I must have some sort of luggage or they will suspect me. I will take my little handbag from here and some cloak straps in my pocket; then at Geneva I will buy some wraps and make up a respectable-looking bundle."

By this time her hopes had revived and her courage had returned. She put back the Bradshaw in Minnie's room, closed her shutters, bolted her window and began to make her preparations in a thoughtful, womanly way.

Fortunately she had had no expenses in Switzerland, and still carried about her the eighteen five pound notes which Bridget had counselled her not to leave behind. In her purse she had also an English sovereign and a little Swiss silver money. "I need not change a note till I get to Geneva, that is a comfort," she reflected, and having carefully destroyed all her letters and packed a few necessaries into her bag, she crept to bed and did her best to sleep, but not very successfully.

The next morning she could most truthfully plead a headache as an excuse for not attending Lady Mount Pleasant's picnic, indeed she remained in bed; and looked so white and tired when Janet and Minnie came to see her that they reported her as quite unfit for the expedition, and only in a state to be left quiet and alone.

"Well," said Sir Matthew, with a look of annoyance, "it can't be helped. She will be right enough to-morrow when her decision is made and everything has settled down quietly."

Bruce Wylie, who had fully intended to settle matters during the course of that day, was forced to acquiesce, and since Lady Mount Pleasant and her contingent had arrived from Montreux, and the carriages were at the door, there was no time for further discussion.

Evereld stole to her window as soon as she heard the sound of wheels and just caught a sideway glimpse of the picnic party driving off. Then in breathless haste she

dressed, put a letter which she had written to Sir Matthew on the previous night in a place where it would quickly be found, bolted her door on the inner side, stepped out of the window and closed both it and the jalousies behind her and went through Minnie's room to the corridor beyond. A chambermaid was sweeping the matting, she smiled in a friendly fashion and asked if mademoiselle was better."

"I still have a headache," said Evereld, "and am going out of doors. If you see Miss Mactavish to-night when she returns, please say I do not wish to be disturbed."

She ran quickly down the stairs, encountering nobody; in the bureau she caught sight of the manager's head, but he had his back turned to the door and did not see her, he was giving out a library book to an old lady who was accounted the greatest gossip in Glion. Mercifully she, too, was absorbed and did not look up.

Evereld walked quietly through the garden; over her dark blue serge dress she wore a little blue capuchin cape with red-lined hood, her sailor hat, and long gauze travelling veil were of the quietest. She was beginning to hope that she should encounter none of the people staying in the hotel when, within a stone's throw of the cable railway station, she came across Dick Lewisham and little Miss Upton.

"Are you better?" said the American kindly. "Your friends told us you were quite knocked up and could not go to the picnic."

"My head aches still," said Evereld, "but—but please don't tell them that you saw me going out."

It is almost impossible for a naturally open and truthful person to carry out a secret scheme without some confidante. Evereld liked and trusted both these acquaintances, and she yielded to that craving for sympathy, that longing for straightforward speech which was perhaps more natural than strictly prudent.

"I could not go to the picnic because I must avoid Mr.

Wylie," she said in a low voice. "My guardian is trying to force me to marry him, and I mean to escape to other friends who will take care of me."

"Did I not tell you how it would be?" said Dick Lewisham.

"Yes," she faltered, "you were quite right; and now there is nothing for me to do but to get away at once."

"Remember," he said, "that you promised to ask my help if you were in any difficulty."

"Yes," said Evereld. "Perhaps now you would just take my ticket to Territet."

"Let us all come down to Territet together," said Miss Upton, "it will be less noticeable than your going quite alone."

Before many minutes were passed the three were gliding down the steep incline, and Evereld grew light hearted to think that the difficult first step had proved so successful.

"Are you sure," said Dick Lewisham, "that you can get to your friends without difficulty?"

"Quite sure, thank you," she said bravely.

"We will not ask you a single question beyond that," he continued, "for the less we know the better. If they put us through any very severe catechism, the utmost we will admit is that you were in the hotel garden before lunch this morning."

"It's quite a romance," said little Miss Upton, rubbing her hands with satisfaction, "and as I shall want to have the third volume, please send it over to me at Boston as soon as it's complete. There's my card."

"I will be sure to write," said Evereld, "and thank you so very much for helping me, both last night and this morning, too. I shall never forget you."

They walked a little way beyond the station in the direction of Montreux until they reached a confectioner's.

"I am going in here to get some food for my journey,"

said Evereld, "I will wish you good bye;" she gave her hand to each of them, shyly thanked Dick Lewisham for his help, and entered the shop.

"End of the second volume," said Miss Upton with a comical expression on her bright face. "Nothing remains for us, Mr. Lewisham, but to kill time by a row on the lake. Take me to see Chillon; nothing but an old and venerable castle will fill up this awful blank, or rouse my interest."

"Oh, we shall have some good fun to-night or to-morrow morning," said Dick Lewisham, "Messrs. Wylie and Mactavish will furnish us with some capital sport. I only hope no harm will happen to that brave little girl."

CHAPTER XXVI

"But, by all thy nature's weakness,
Hidden faults and follies known,
Be thou, in rebuking evil,
Conscious of thine own.

. . . . . .

"So, when thoughts of evil-doers
Waken scorn, or hatred move,
Shall a mournful fellow-feeling
Temper all with love."

WHITTIER.

LADY MOUNT PLEASANT'S picnic proved a successful affair, and Sir Matthew prevailed on her to dine with them at the Rigi Vaudois on her way home. Minnie, running upstairs to change her dress after the gong had sounded, had scant time to think of Evereld, she rang for hot water and flew about her room making the hastiest of toilettes, it was only as the chambermaid was just closing the door that she called after her.

"Marie! Wait a moment. Have you seen Miss Ewart? Is she better?"

"I have seen her, Mademoiselle, and she still has *migraine*," said the chambermaid.

"Well see that she has all she needs," said Minnie hurriedly pinning a cluster of roses in her dress.

"Yes, Mademoiselle. But she left word expressly that she did not want to be disturbed."

"Ah, then I will not go in," said Minnie, flying along the corridor, and running downstairs.

"But I will just ask if the *pauvre petite* would like a *tisane?*" reflected the chambermaid knocking at Evereld's door. "No response! 'Tis strange, I will knock again. Mademoiselle! It is I, Marie. Well, 'tis use-

less to wait. Without doubt she sleeps. These English are always heavy sleepers, and after all, sleep is the best cure for *la migraine.*"

But next morning when to repeated knocks there was still no answer, Marie began to feel anxious. She consulted Miss Mactavish.

"Miss Ewart often goes out early in the morning. I expect she has locked her door and taken her key to the *bureau,*" was Minnie's matter-of-fact solution of the problem.

"No, Mademoiselle, the key is not in the bureau. It is on the inside of the door. I fear Mademoiselle must be very ill."

"Well, we can soon find out," said Minnie, opening her window and stepping on to the balcony.

To unbolt the *jalousies* and open Evereld's French window was the work of a minute, but Minnie gave a gasp of surprise when she found the room quite empty. Remembering however the curious eyes of the chambermaid she controlled herself.

"Perhaps she is with Lady Mactavish, I will see," she exclaimed, and hastily ran down to the next floor in search of her father. She found him in their private sitting-room, writing letters, and quickly told her discovery.

"Can the child have been so foolish as to run away," he exclaimed in dismay. "Well she can't have gone far, that is one comfort; we shall soon track her. I will come up with you and see if we can find any clue. Run on first and tell the maid it is all right and get her out of the way."

He followed more leisurely, and passing through his daughter's room went by the balcony to Evereld's deserted chamber.

"The bed has been slept in," he remarked in a tone of satisfaction, "she has not gone far."

It did not occur to him that it had never been made on the previous day, that was just one of those small points of

detail which would escape an ordinary man. Minnie instantly thought of it, but she held her tongue, and began hurriedly to see what clothes Evereld had taken with her.

"Her little travelling bag has gone," she said, "and her hat and cloak. See, too, here is a letter just inside her portmanteau directed to you, Papa."

Sir Matthew who began to look seriously disturbed tore open the letter and hastily read the following lines:—

"MY DEAR SIR MATTHEW:

"Nothing will induce me to marry Mr. Wylie, and as you insist on my accepting his proposal within the next two days, and refuse to pay any heed to what I say as to my future marriage with Ralph, you force me to act for myself. Please do not be anxious about my safety—I am going straight to friends who will take every care of me, and it will be useless to try to make me live again under your roof.

"If you make any attempt to force me back I shall put myself under the protection of the Lord Chancellor, and ask for a thorough investigation of my affairs. My love to Lady Mactavish and Minnie. I am sorry to vex you all, but you have left me no alternative.

"Yours affly,

EVERELD EWART."

He handed the letter to his daughter, and paced the room, dumb for the time with anger and surprise.

"Where can she have gone?" said Minnie. "And how on earth can we hush it up here?"

"Easily enough," said her father with contempt in his tone, "say that she has joined some friends in Montreux, and we can all leave to-morrow. Indeed I shall go straight home to-day and track her out. Little minx! Who would have thought her capable of such resistance! A little blue-eyed slip of a girl, who had hardly a word to say for herself!"

He turned away in search of Bruce Wylie, and was glad to see that his friend was shocked and perplexed by the news. To do the lawyer justice he was really anxious about Evereld's safety.

"Upon my soul, Mactavish, it's an ugly business," he said uneasily, "a young girl fresh from school, innocent and ignorant and quite unprotected, crossing Europe alone! I hope to goodness she has gone to those friends of hers at Champéry. I will set off this morning and see. She would naturally think of them."

"It's possible," said Sir Matthew, with a look of relief. "You go there, and I will go straight to London making close inquiry all along the route. Perhaps we may be able to learn something from the people in the hotel without rousing their curiosity too much. We must avoid getting the girl talked about. That would be fatal."

"It's a hateful business," said Bruce Wylie frowning, "I wish I had never meddled with it."

"There was more in the child than we dreamt of," said Sir Matthew. "She was quiet and gentle and affectionate and I never thought it possible she would show so stubborn a front. Look at the letter. Why old Ewart himself might have penned it. As ill luck would have it, she heard the day before yesterday that changes have been made as to the investment of her money, and I fear she suspects that all is not right. How on earth she came to know anything about the Lord Chancellor and her power of appeal to him I can't conceive."

"Probably through 'Iolanthe' and the 'such a susceptible Chancellor,'" said Bruce Wylie with a mirthless laugh, or through some of her beloved Charles Dickens' novels. The fact is, Mactavish, we educate our girls now-a-days, but expect them to remain fools. Unless we can track Evereld, and force her to obey you, she has the game in her own hands. Great Heaven! just think of it! That little girl can absolutely ruin our career, can give the pin-prick which will burst the whole bubble."

It was exasperating to the last degree, and to men who had always taken the lowest view of womanhood, it was wholly perplexing. They went down to the *salle à man-*

ger trying to look unconcerned, but Miss Upton's keen eyes read their perturbation.

She enjoyed it hugely.

"I guess you had a good time yesterday up at the Rochers de Naye?" she said blithely.

"Very, thank you," said Sir Matthew, "though we were all disappointed that my ward was not with us. Have you seen anything of her?"

The American girl met his keen gaze without flinching in the least.

"She was in the garden for a little while yesterday."

"Ah, indeed," Sir Matthew was all on the alert. "Did you have any talk with her?"

"Well—I inquired after her headache," said Miss Upton casually. "How is she this morning?" and with perfect *sang froid* she began to eat an egg American fashion, a proceeding which she well knew would make Sir Matthew shudder.

"Thank you, she is better," he said, taking refuge in his cup of coffee.

"I'm so glad," said Miss Upton sweetly. "We must have some more thought-reading this evening, Mr. Wylie. Perhaps Miss Ewart will be able to show me the experiment you were speaking of the other night. You are always successful with her, are you not?"

Dick Lewisham at an adjoining table bent low over his newspaper to hide his amusement.

"Unfortunately," said the solicitor, "we are obliged to leave to-day, or it would have given me the greatest pleasure."

"What a mistake to leave just when we are all such a nice, congenial party," said the American. "Is Miss Ewart really fit to go? She looked so white and ill when I saw her yesterday."

"She has been travelling about in Switzerland some time," said Sir Matthew, "and will, I think, be glad to settle down at home."

"I can understand that," said Miss Upton. "I don't think the hotel life was quite congenial to her. Now, we Americans are brought up to live in public from our childhood, it's second nature to us, and we are accustomed to so much more liberty than you allow your girls. I suppose though your English girls are much more tractable and obedient than we are."

Sir Matthew winced.

"Comparisons are odious," said Bruce Wylie, with ready politeness, and after a very scanty breakfast the two men retired discomforted, while Dick Lewisham and the bright-eyed American enjoyed a quiet laugh at their expense.

To get any clue as to Evereld's movements seemed impossible, and Sir Matthew did not care to put the matter into the hands of the police, or to employ a private detective. In his own mind he felt convinced that Evereld had gone to England, and he travelled home with the utmost speed, having first telegraphed to his confidential clerk to meet him at Victoria by the boat train on the following afternoon.

"All well I hope, sir," said Smither, the clerk, as Sir Matthew gave him a pleasant greeting.

"Quite, thank you; did you get that address?"

"Yes, sir," and the clerk handed him a paper. "Da Costa the agent gave it me."

On the paper were inscribed the words, "Macneillie's Company, September 20-27, Theatre Royal. Rilchester."

Sir Matthew promptly detached a key from his ring and handed it to Smither.

"Just see my portmanteau through the Custom House," he said, "I must catch the next train at King's Cross, and will only take my bag with me."

He drove off, but took the precaution of calling at the house in Queen Anne's Gate that he might see whether any clue as to Evereld's movements was to be had from

Geraghty or Bridget. Their entire ignorance was however so transparent, and Bridget's inquiries after her young mistress were so natural that he went off to King's Cross more certain than ever that Evereld had avoided London and had gone straight to her lover. He dined in the train, arrived at Rilchester soon after ten o'clock that evening, took up his quarters at the Station Hotel, and sent a messenger to the stage door of the theatre to inquire as to Ralph Denmead's address, being careful to avoid giving his name. When however he had obtained what he wanted and after some trouble had discovered the quiet street to which he had been directed, it was only to find that Ralph was still at the theatre.

"He'll not be back for at least another half hour," said the landlady. "Can I give him any message?"

"I had better come in and wait," said Sir Matthew.

The landlady hesitated a moment, but being impressed as most people were by Sir Matthew's manner and bearing, she admitted him and showed him into a fairly comfortable room where the supper-table was laid for two people.

"I have caught them," said Sir Matthew to himself with an inward chuckle of satisfaction. "The little fool with her grand talk of the Lord Chancellor's protection! She has ruined her case now. We shall have a scene, that can't be helped. All's well that ends well."

Picking up a newspaper he installed himself comfortably in an armchair, and awaited Ralph's return. Presently steps were heard outside, the street door was opened, and two people entered the passage, he put down his paper and listened. The voice speaking was certainly Ralph's.

"It's the worst house we have had this week, there weren't a dozen people in the Stalls. Ah! I see there's a note for you here."

There followed sounds as of the opening of an envelope and then the door handle turned, and Sir Matthew looked up expectantly. Instead however of his runaway ward,

there entered a middle-aged man intently reading an open letter; for a moment Sir Matthew failed to recognise the tired and rather despondent face, then it flashed upon him that this must be Hugh Macneillie. He moved somewhat uneasily, and the actor recalled to the present, lifted his eyes from the letter and looked at him in mute astonishment.

"I called to see Mr. Denmead," said Sir Matthew, and at that moment Ralph blithe and cheerful as ever came into the room giving an astonished exclamation as he caught sight of his godfather. He greeted him however with all proper formality and introduced Macneillie. There was a momentary pause after that; the situation was somewhat embarrassing.

"I hope Evereld is well?" he said, chiefly for the sake of breaking the silence.

"I have come here to make inquiries about Evereld," said Sir Matthew grimly. "Have the goodness to tell me at once where she is."

"Is she not in Switzerland with Lady Mactavish?" said Ralph, astonishment and anxiety plainly to be seen in his face.

"My good fellow, I know you are an actor, but spare me this private exhibition," said Sir Matthew waving his hand in the old manner. "You know that she has sought refuge with you, and the sooner you give her up to her lawful guardian the better it will be for you both."

"I think you must have gone out of your mind," said Ralph, fuming. "How should I know anything of Evereld's movements? She is unfortunately under your protection till she is of age. Do you mean that you have lost her?"

"Yes, that is exactly what I do mean," said Sir Matthew wrathfully. "She merely left a letter behind her saying that she had gone to friends who would take care of her, and she had had the audacity on the previous day

to tell me with her own lips that she would never marry any one but you."

"She is gone?" said Ralph in horror. "But where?"

"That is precisely what I want to learn from you?" said Sir Matthew with a cold sarcastic smile.

"You brute!" said Ralph beside himself with passion. "How can you torture me like this? Tell me when she left you, and why? You must have treated her shamefully, or she would never have taken such a step."

"You don't impose upon me in the least by all this tragedy acting," said Sir Matthew. "I am satisfied that you know quite well where she is. Probably she is in this house."

Ralph seemed on the point of springing at his torturer's throat, when Macneillie laid a strong hand on his shoulder and drew him back.

"My dear boy, leave this to me" he said. "Surely Sir Matthew, you cannot seriously believe that we know anything of Miss Ewart's movements? From the little I know of her I should imagine she was far too right-minded and sensible to dream of attempting to seek refuge with her lover. I saw her once or twice in August when she was staying with Mrs. Hereford at Southbourne, and was struck by her quiet common-sense."

Sir Matthew was obliged to alter his tone, for he saw at once that there was force in what Macneillie said.

"She told me she had met you at Southbourne. I suppose it was there, Ralph, that you had the presumption to ask her to marry you?"

Ralph had by this time recovered his self-control, he replied with a sort of quiet dignity which Sir Matthew resented much more than the outburst of anger.

"It was there that I told her I hoped some day to work my way up in the profession. It was there I learnt that our love was mutual. Surely she will have gone to Mrs. Hereford for protection. That would be her most natural impulse."

"Well, I had not thought of that. Are the Herefords in London?" said Sir Matthew, feeling that there was a good deal of sense in the suggestion.

"No, they will not be back till Parliament meets, but I know their address in County Wicklow, and will telegraph to them to-morrow."

Sir Matthew frowned: it galled him terribly to feel that he was helpless.

"After all," he exclaimed. "She may have had the sense to go to her old Governess in Germany. She would be far more likely to confide in her than in Mrs. Hereford. I will telegraph to Dresden and inquire."

"And when you have learnt where she is what do you propose to do?" said Ralph.

"Fetch her home, of course, and make her realise what people think of such escapades."

Ralph seemed about to reply but he checked himself.

"Did you imagine I was going to let her set me at defiance?" said Sir Matthew. "Do you think a girl of nineteen will get the better of me?"

"Yes," said Ralph, quietly. "I think she will."

Sir Matthew laughed maliciously and rose to go.

"You're a true Denmead," he said. "Always sanguine, always foolish and unpractical. Well, good-night, Mr. Macneillie. I am sorry to have inflicted this visit on you. Good-night Ralph. Let me know at the Station Hotel as soon as you get a reply from the Herefords."

Ralph showed him to the door in silence, and returning to the sitting-room, flung himself down in a chair by the supper-table, and buried his face in his hands.

"What can I do!" he groaned. "Surely there must be something I could do for her."

"Eat boy, eat," said Macneillie in his genial voice. "You can't think to any purpose when you are dog-tired and as hungry as a hunter. All very well for Sir Matthew to come in here and rant at half past eleven when he had

dined luxuriously at eight, but for strolling players, who feed at four and work like galley slaves all the evening, it's not so easy."

While he talked, he had been carving cold beef, and Ralph who at the best of times was a small supper eater, and had never felt less inclined for a meal, found himself forced to begin whether he would or not.

"Here's a salad that I mixed this afternoon after Sydney Smith's own receipt," said Macneillie. "It would be sudden death to most men of this generation close upon midnight but it's the reward of hard work to acquire the digestion of the ostrich and to sleep the sleep of the righteous."

He talked on much in the way he had talked long ago in the Pass of Leny when he had helped Ralph along the road to Kilmahog; it was the sort of conversation which did not demand much response, but never failed to hold the hearer's attention, because it was racy and humourous. But by and bye when they had lighted their pipes, he reverted to Sir Matthew's visit.

"Curious man, that ex-guardian of yours," he said musingly. "I am not surprised that you two never hit it off. I wonder what it was that drove little Miss Ewart to take such a decided step."

"I am certain it was some question of marriage," said Ralph. "Probably he wanted that brute Wylie to have the control of her fortune. I have always detested that man. Governor! What am I to do? Will you spare me for a week and let me see if I can help her?"

"No, my dear boy, I will not do anything of the sort," said Macneillie resolutely, yet with a most kindly look in his eyes. "I know it's a hard thing for you to stay here and go on with your work as if nothing had happened, and while all the time you are sick with anxiety, but it's what we all of us have to put up with now and again. Besides, you could do no good and you might do great harm.

Those who know Miss Ewart best are the ones who ought to have most confidence in her womanly wisdom. Depend upon it she is perfectly safe. Such a quiet, well-bred girl as that might go alone unharmed from one end of Europe to the other."

Ralph pushed back his chair and paced the room restlessly. "The suspense is the intolerable part of it," he said, with a break in his voice.

"I have good reason to know how hard suspense is to bear," said Macneillie. "And yet it's not the worst, for there's always a large mixture of hope in it. Come let us write out your telegram to the Herefords, it will need careful wording."

The next day was Sunday, but the telegraph office was open for two hours in the morning, and upon the stroke of eight Ralph stood at the door with his message to Ireland. He returned again between half past nine and ten and waited drearily in the office for the reply. But the deep bell of the cathedral boomed out the hour and still no answer came.

"Open again between five and six, sir," said the official, showing him to the door. And Ralph, miserably depressed, made his way to the cathedral. Here for a time he found comfort; but during the psalms the verger ushered a late-comer into the stall exactly facing him. He saw at a glance that it was Sir Matthew, and after that there was no more peace for him, but a dire struggle with his angry heart.

After service was over, Sir Matthew joined him in the Close, greeting him just as if nothing had happened.

"Did you telegraph to the Herefords?" he asked.

"Yes, but as yet there is no reply," said Ralph.

"And I have not heard back from Dresden. We shall both hear this afternoon. Come and dine with me at eight o'clock and you shall hear the result."

"Thank you," said Ralph. "But we leave for Nottingham by the eight ten."

"Come to lunch now then."

But to sit down and eat with the man who had wrought such havoc in his life and had driven Evereld to take such a desperate step was more than Ralph could endure. He excused himself, promising, however, to come round at six o'clock to the hotel and report any news he might receive from Ireland. His face when he arrived was not reassuring; he looked pale and miserable.

"What news?" said Sir Matthew eagerly.

"None," said Ralph, handing the telegram to his godfather. The words struck a chill to Sir Matthew's heart.

"Know nothing about her at all. Imagined she was in Switzerland still with her guardian."

"I have had a similar one from Dresden," he replied. "She is not there and wrote last nearly a month ago."

"Is there any clue whatever in the letter she left behind for you?" suggested Ralph, with a strong desire to see it. Sir Matthew took from his breast-pocket a methodically arranged packet, and drew out Evereld's note.

"I can find no clue in it," he said, "perhaps you may be able to do so."

Ralph eagerly read the letter. There was not the slightest hint as to the direction Evereld had taken, but something in the quiet assurance, the guarded, dignified tone of the short note brought him comfort. It revealed a side of his old play-fellow's character which had hitherto lain dormant.

"Well," said Sir Matthew sharply. "You look relieved. What do you make of it? Where do you think she has gone?"

"I have no idea," said Ralph. "The letter tells nothing. Still she wouldn't have written so calmly and con-

fidently if her plans had not been well thought out. Evereld is not impulsive. Perhaps she had met friends while you were travelling and has gone to them."

"No, I had a telegram in London from Bruce Wylie who went over to Champèry on purpose to interview a school friend she had met. She had heard nothing whatever about her. I shall have to set a private detective to work."

Ralph flushed.

"You would surely not do that?" he said quickly.

"Why not? I must find her. And I intend to bring her back to my house."

"Well," said Ralph, "the one thing that remains absolutely certain is that when Evereld says a thing she means it with her whole heart. She will certainly appeal to the Lord Chancellor, and I don't think he will compel her to return to your house when he has heard the whole truth."

"Do you dare to assert that I have not been in every respect a faithful and kind guardian to her? I who was her father's oldest friend?"

"I assert nothing," said Ralph bitterly, as he moved to the door. "But I can't forget what your friendship for my father led to."

Sir Matthew made no reply, but turned abruptly to the window, the colour mounting to his temples. The closing of the door and the sound of Ralph's retreating footsteps came as a relief.

"If I had but guessed what a serpent's tooth that boy would prove to me I would have shipped him straight off to the Colonies instead of educating him," he thought to himself. "I was weak—pitiably weak! It was the look of Denmead's face as he lay there dead that unmanned me. There was the ghastly quiet of the country, too, and the child with his old-world politeness, and that old lawyer with his suspicions. If I had only been sensible enough to

stamp out all sentiment and do the practical thing at once my plans would not be thwarted now by a chit of a girl who has lost her heart to a penniless actor."

His face grew dark with anxiety and trouble as he reflected on the desperate position of his own affairs should Evereld succeed in baffling him.

CHAPTER XXVII

"When a friend asks, there is no to-morrow."
GEORGE HERBERT.

WHEN Evereld parted with the kindly American girl and Dick Lewisham a sense of great loneliness for a time overwhelmed her. She looked in a dazed way at the various delicacies displayed in the prettily arranged shop, wondering whether she would ever feel hungry again. Having at last selected some dainty little meat patties, and two crescent-shaped rolls, she walked on to the next halting-place of the electric tram, and, after a very brief waiting, found herself, to her great relief, comfortably installed in a corner seat *en route* for Vevey. She had judged it more prudent to take the tram, knowing that she would more easily be traced had she gone direct from Territet station to Geneva by the railroad or by steamer. When once they were safely out of Montreux, and the risk of meeting any of the visitors in the Rigi Vaudois was practically over, she breathed more freely, even finding time to enjoy the lovely glimpses of the lake and the mountains as they sped through Clarens and the pretty surroundings of Vevey.

Arrived at length in that quaint old town, she was set down at the railway station, where she prudently took her ticket only as far as Lausanne, travelling second class because she knew that she was less liable to find herself alone, and had heard the continental saying that only fools and Englishmen travel first class. It was during the twenty minutes' waiting time at Lausanne that her perplexities began.

A kindly looking English lady, seeing that she seemed to be alone, sat down beside her and began to talk about the weather and the scenery. Finally she hazarded a direct question.

"Have you a long journey before you?"

"Not very long," said Evereld, colouring, as she glanced inquiringly into her companion's face, as though to make sure what sort of person she was. In one sense the look reassured her, for the most suspicious mortal could not have credited this mild-faced lady with evil design, but, on the other hand, she was evidently one of those inquisitive mortals who delight in asking questions, in season and out of season.

"I am going myself to Geneva, if that is your direction we might perhaps travel together," said the lady pleasantly.

"Thank you," said Evereld, reflecting that after all she could baffle the questions by reading when once they had started.

"It is not so easy for a girl to travel alone abroad as it is in England," said her companion, looking curiously at Evereld's girlish face. "I almost wonder your parents allow it."

"I have no parents," said Evereld.

"Indeed, and have you been staying with friends?"

"Yes," said Evereld. "And I am on my way now to some other friends." Murmuring an excuse she sprang up and went to the window to see whether the train was nearly ready.

"This is dreadful," she reflected. "If we talk much longer she will drag the whole story out of me. I will buy some papers and try to make her read."

"You are sure your luggage is all right?" exclaimed the good lady the moment she returned.

"Quite sure, thank you," said Evereld, clasping her hand bag closer and trembling lest she should be asked some quite unanswerable question.

At length an official began vigorously to ring the great bell in the doorway and to shout the intelligence that passengers for Geneva and various other places must take their seats.

"Can I help you?" said Evereld, politely offering to take a basket from the large heap of possessions with which her neighbour was surrounded. She was startled to feel something jump inside it in an uncanny way.

"Thank you if you would. To tell the truth it is my little dog in there, but he is such a good traveller, I don't think you will mind him."

"Shall I say that I detest dogs and so escape to another carriage?" reflected Evereld smiling to herself. But on the whole in spite of the tiresome questions she rather liked this good English lady and found a certain comfort in her presence when once they were installed in the train. Her spirits rose as they travelled further and further from the Mactavishs, she even grew hungry, made short work of the provisions she had bought, parried her friend's questions skilfully by counter questions about the pet dog and finally took refuge in "Pride and Prejudice" and in the delicious humour of Jane Austen's characters forgot all her dangers and difficulties till the train steamed into Geneva station.

"I suppose your friends will meet you?" asked the talkative lady as she fastened the dog up in his basket.

"No," said Evereld, "but I shall manage very well now, thank you," and with rather hurried farewells she sprang from the carriage not offering to carry the basket any further but promising to send a porter. Fortunately her companion was in such a bustle with the effort of collecting her various belongings that she did not notice the English girl's somewhat abrupt departure, and Evereld with a joyful sense of escape made her way to the outside of the station and getting into one of the little public carriages drove off to make her purchases in the town.

Having bought an ulster and a warm shawl which made a very respectable show when put into her cloak straps she went back to the station, dined in a leisurely way and passed the rest of her two hours' waiting time as patiently as she could. By six o'clock she was safely in the train once more, with the happy knowledge that she had no more changes that night, and would arrive at Lyons in rather more than four hours. Her heart danced for joy as she reflected that by the next afternoon she might have safely reached Bride O'Ryan and Aimée Magnay, her greatest friends, in Mrs. Magnay's old home in Auvergne. That was the safe refuge towards which she was steering her course, that was the thought which had darted into her mind on the previous evening when she had decided that flight was the only thing under the circumstances.

Later on however when darkness had stolen like a pall over the landscape, when weary with want of sleep and worn out with excitement and anxiety, the glad sense of escape died away, she grew unutterably sad-hearted and forlorn.

At the other end of the carriage two men wrangled together over the vexed question of having the window open or shut. A fat French lady went to sleep and snored monotonously, just opposite her a young couple on their honeymoon laughed and chatted in low tones with much outward demonstration, while beyond a young mother sat with her baby in her arms, an air of placid content on her face.

Never before had Evereld felt such a unit, never before had she realised how really alone she was in the world. She shuddered to think what would have become of her if Ralph had never crossed her path. And then as the engine throbbed on through the darkness all those terrors of imagining from which her healthy uneventful life had so far been exempt, laid strong hold upon her, and made the night hideous.

She saw Ralph lying ill and forlorn in a fever hospital. She saw him lying with pale lips and hands folded in the awful calm of death. She saw herself alone and broken-hearted, struggling to make something of her maimed life and failing in the attempt. She saw Sir Matthew tracking her out and carrying her back to the house in Queen Anne's Gate. Worst of all she saw herself standing in church and passively allowing herself to be married to Bruce Wylie.

She had just reached this climax in her miserable thoughts when as the train stopped at the wayside station the door of the carriage was opened and in came a very aged priest whose rusty black raiment had an old and somewhat countrified look. His thin, worn face might have been stern in youth, but the passing years had mellowed it, and like Southey's holly tree what had once been sharp and aggressive had grown tender as it more nearly approached heaven. His keen eyes seemed to take in the occupants of the carriage in one glance and he at once divined that the sad little English girl in the corner was for some reason feeling altogether desolate. He took the vacant place beside her and began to unwrap a package which he carried. It proved to be a cage containing a bullfinch, and Evereld watched with interest the scared fluttering of the bird and the gentle reassuring face of the old man as he tried to pacify it.

"It is its first journey," he said glancing at her. "The unaccustomed has terrors for us all. It will soon understand that it is quite safe. Eh, Fifi? Should I let any harm happen to thee, thou foolish one?"

"Can it sing any tune?" said Evereld. "We had one in London that sang a bit of the National Anthem."

"And Fifi is just as patriotic," said the old priest laughing, "he will pipe two lines of *Partant pour la Syrie*, I am taking him to cheer up one of my parishioners who is lying ill at Lyons. He will think Fifi from

the Presbytère almost as good as one of his own friends from the village. And when the lad is better why he will bring back this winged missionary to me. My old housekeeper would not hear of parting with Fifi altogether, he is the life of the house she says."

The bird growing now more accustomed to its strange surroundings piped cheerfully the familiar air of the refrain

"*Amour a la plus belle*
Honneur au plus vaillant."

"Ah! he sings better than ours ever did," said Evereld thinking of the bird Ralph had brought from Whinhaven.

"And he is more tractable than a choir boy," said the old priest laughing. "Does he sing too loud and tire one's head—it is but to cover his cage and he is as quiet as any mouse."

After that they drifted into talk about life in rural France, and by the time they reached Lyons Evereld felt that the old man had become quite a friend.

The other passengers scrambled out of the carriage each intent on his own affairs, but the priest helped her courteously with her roll of cloaks.

"Would you mind telling me what is the best and most quiet hotel to go to?" she asked. "I cannot get on any further till nine o'clock to-morrow morning. I am on my way to stay with friends near Clermont Ferrand."

"You are over young my child," he said, "to travel unprotected. But I know it is not in England as with us, the young *demoiselles* have greater liberty. The best plan will be for you to go to an Hotel close by. As it happens I know the manager and his wife and if you will permit me I will walk with you to the door, and ask them to take good care of you. I think you are like Fifi, not over well-accustomed to travelling."

"Thank you very much," said Evereld gratefully. "Now I shall feel safe indeed."

The old priest piloted her across the crowded platform and having given her luggage to the hotel porter himself took her to the Manager's little office where Madame, a comely and pleasant looking woman, sat at her desk busily casting up accounts. Her face lighted up at sight of the old man.

"A thousand welcomes Father Nicolas, it is long since you paid us a visit."

"You are well," said the old priest, "I need not ask that, for it is easily to be seen, and busy as usual. Is your husband in?"

"He will be desolated, but he has gone to his Club."

"Ah, well, I will call and see him to-morrow. In the meantime will you kindly do your utmost to make this young English lady feel at home and comfortable. She is unable to travel further till the 8.59 to-morrow morning. I leave you in good hands," he said, taking kindly leave of Evereld, "Madame has a great reputation for taking good care of her guests."

"It will be my greatest pleasure," said the manager's wife. "Mademoiselle looks tired and will doubtless like to go to her room."

Evereld assented and toiled upstairs after the brisk capable looking manageress who chatted pleasantly as they went.

"He has the best of hearts, old Father Nicolas," she said. "I have known him since I was a child. There is not a living thing I verily believe that he does not love. It was a sight to see him standing on a winter's morning in the garden of the Presbytère and feeding the birds before he went to Mass."

"Where does he live?" asked Evereld.

"At Arvron, a little village where there are many poor. His people adore him. This will be your room, made-

moiselle, and shall I send you up a little hot soup to take the last thing, or will you rather come down to the *salle à manger?*"

"I should like it here please," said Evereld. "And you won't let me over-sleep myself and miss the train to-morrow. I am so tired, I think I should sleep the clock round if no one called me."

"I will call you myself," said the manageress. "It is a busy life here and I am always an early riser. *Bon soir, mademoiselle.* I hope you will be quite rested by the morning."

"How much easier it has all been than I expected," thought Evereld, as she made her preparations for the night. "To think that this time yesterday I was at Glion and in such a panic lest anything should prevent my getting away! I wonder whether I had better telegraph to Mrs. Magnay, and tell her I am on my way to ask her protection? I don't think I will. It might lead to my being traced later on, and besides I have no idea whether there is a telegraph office within reasonable reach of the Château. How I wonder what it will be like."

Her reflections were interrupted by the arrival of a pretty young chambermaid who brought her a basin of the most delicious soup; and long before midnight she was sound asleep and dreaming of Bride and Aimée.

She woke up in excellent spirits, chatted with Madame as she breakfasted on the coffee and rolls, which the pretty chambermaid brought to her bedroom, and set off on the next stage of her journey full of hope for the future and relief that all had passed off so well. At that very minute Sir Matthew Mactavish was ruefully regarding her empty room at Glion and wondering how he could possibly trace her out. But Evereld was too busy to trouble herself much over the thought of his well-deserved discomfiture. Every one seemed intent on being kind to her here. The Manageress was almost motherly in her solicitude, the

chambermaid waited on her as though service were a pleasure, and the hotel porter neglected the other passengers in the omnibus until he had seen her safely established in the *salle d'attente* with her possessions. Here to her surprise she found old Father Nicolas reading his breviary.

"It was too early yet to see the sick lad I told you of," he explained, "so I thought I would start you on your way, if you will permit me the pleasure."

"I shall never forget all your kindness," she said gratefully. "I was feeling so dreadfully alone till you got into the train last night."

"Well it is no bad thing to learn what loneliness means," said the old man thoughtfully. "Nothing so well teaches you to go through life on the look out for the lonely, that you may serve them. Ha! They come to announce your train. I will inquire if you have a change of carriages at Montbrison." He hurried away, returning in a minute or two to help her with her packages.

"Yes, I am sorry to say they will turn you out at Montbrison, but you will have only ten minutes waiting and no difficulty at all in that quiet place. I see M. Dubochet and his two daughters—very pleasant people—will you go in the same carriage?"

And so with a few pleasant words of introduction to Mademoiselle Dubochet, Father Nicolas bade Evereld God-speed, and as the train moved off she looked out wistfully after her kindly old friend, wondering whether she should ever again come across him.

The clock was striking five when after an uneventful journey Evereld found herself outside the station at Clermont-Ferrand, giving orders to a somewhat rough-looking Auvergnat to drive her to the Château de Mabillon. The man seemed inclined to hold out for a certain sum for the journey and as Evereld had no notion of the distance, she was determined to make no rash promises. It would

never do to be extravagant now, for there was no saying how long her last allowance would have to supply her wants.

"M. Magnay will settle with you when we reach the château," she said with a little touch of dignity in her manner. The man instantly subsided, feeling that he had no stranger to deal with, but a friend of the family. And Claude Magnay's name was quite sufficient to assure him that he would receive his rightful fare, but not the extortionate sum he had demanded of the new comer.

The little incident had however depressed Evereld. She had spoken confidently to the man but now a qualm of doubt came over her. She was about to cast herself on the mercy of Aimée's parents, and after all she knew little about them: on their occasional visits to Southbourne, she had gone with Aimée and Bride to spend Saturday afternoon with them, and she had been three or four times to their London house, but she realised now that she was going to ask a very great favour of them, and that possibly they might not care to shelter her from her lawful guardian.

These thoughts lasted all the time they were driving through the narrow and dingy streets of Clermont Ferrand, and she fancied that the lava built houses seemed to frown upon her and to assure her that she was an unwelcome visitor. Before long however they had left the town behind them and were driving through the most beautiful country, and in that sunny smiling landscape it was impossible to give way to anxious thoughts. The glowing colours of the autumn leaves, the picturesque vineyards, the river with its gleaming water reflecting the blue sky, and the strange irregular mountains which rose on every hand filled her with delight.

The sun had set when at length they reached a narrower and more secluded valley; Evereld fancied they must be getting near to Mabillon and inquired of her driver.

"It is two kilometres to the château," said the Auvergnat. Then after a few minutes he again turned round from the box seat. "Madame Magnay and her daughter are down at the mill yonder," he said.

"Oh, stop then, and let me speak to them," said Evereld eagerly; and springing from the carriage she hastened towards Aimée who quickly perceived her and ran forward with a cry of joyful astonishment.

"This is a delightful surprise. Are you travelling back through France? Mother, you remember Evereld?"

Mrs. Magnay gave her a charming greeting, containing all the warmth and animation which English greetings so often lack.

"I remember Evereld very well, and am more delighted than I can say to welcome her to my dear old home."

"You are very good," said Evereld shyly, "I have come to you because I was in great trouble, and I thought —I felt sure—you would help and advise me. It is impossible for me to stay longer with Sir Matthew Mactavish."

Her eyes were full of tears, and Mrs. Magnay taking her hand began to lead her towards the carriage.

"You are quite tired out, poor child," she said caressingly. "We are very sorry for your trouble, but very glad that it brought you to Mabillon. This evening you shall tell us all about it. Do you see that pretty girl waving her hand to us from the cottage door? That is my dear old Javotte's granddaughter. Aimée has told you how she starved herself in the siege of Paris that we might have food enough. Dear old woman!"

"And here is one of the best views of Mont D'Or," said Aimée, "only the light is fading so fast you can't properly see it."

Chatting thus, they soon reached the old château, a great part of which had now been carefully restored, and Mrs. Magnay seeing how pale and worn her guest looked, determined to take her straight upstairs.

"Run Aimée," she said, "and tell your father to settle with the driver, and then bring a cup of tea for Evereld. I shall take her to Bride's room, she will be more snug in there I think."

So Evereld was taken straight to her friend, and then while Mrs. Magnay herself kindled the wood fire, and daintily piled up fir-cones to catch the blaze, Bride made her rest in the snuggest of easy chairs, and she had very soon told them the whole story.

"I know nothing of English law," said Mrs. Magnay. "Are you sure you can put yourself under the protection of the Lord Chancellor?"

"I think so," said Evereld. "Don't you remember, Bride, how we used to tease you about your answer in that examination we had, when you wrote—"The Lord Chancellor must be a very busy man for Blackstone says he is the natural guardian of all orphans, idiots and lunatics."

"To be sure I do," said Bride laughing. "Well if Blackstone says so, you must surely be right."

"I will go and talk over matters with my husband, and see what he advises, and in the meantime, Bride, I strongly advise you to put Evereld to bed. She looks to me quite tired out. Rest and forget your troubles, dear. No one can molest you at Mabillon, and you say that Sir Matthew can have no clue to your whereabouts."

"No, he will naturally think I have gone to Mrs. Hereford, or to my old governess at Dresden," said Evereld. "To-morrow I must write to Mrs. Hereford and ask her to let Ralph know that I am safe. I am so afraid he may hear that I have disappeared and be anxious about me."

"Write to him," said Bride, "and let Doreen forward your letter."

In the meantime Mrs. Magnay told the whole story to her husband, and it was decided that he should put the case straight into the hands of a London solicitor. Evereld, being consulted as to the one she would prefer, un-

hesitatingly named Ralph's old friend Mr. Marriott of Basinghall Street, and as Claude Magnay knew that she could not have mentioned a more trustworthy and efficient man he wrote to him and made her on the following morning also write with a full description of all that had passed, of her suspicions with regard to her fortune and of her wish for a thorough investigation of her affairs.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"No action whether foul or fair,
Is ever done, but it leaves somewhere
A record, written by fingers ghostly,
As a blessing or a curse, and mostly
In the greater weakness or greater strength
Of the acts that follow it, till at length
The wrongs of ages are redressed,
And the justice of God made manifest."

THE GOLDEN LEGEND.

RALPH'S anxieties came to an end while the Company were fulfilling their engagement at Nottingham. For one never to be forgotten day there arrived a letter from Mrs. Hereford, enclosing a long letter on foreign paper from Evereld. The sheet bore no address and she did not mention the name of the friends who were taking care of her, but she told him all about their kindness, and that Bride O'Ryan was with her, that she was quite safe from molestation and in the depths of the country far away among mountains and woods, where neither Sir Matthew nor Bruce Wylie could trouble her peace.

Later on came news from Mrs. Hereford that Evereld's affairs had been put into the hands of Mr. Marriott, and that Mr. Hereford was in consultation with the old lawyer and would do everything he possibly could: offering, if it were thought well, to become Evereld's guardian and trustee should the Lord Chancellor decide to deprive Sir Matthew of the Trusteeship. After that for some time came no news at all.

At last, growing anxious, Ralph made a hurried expedition to town late one Saturday night, and sought out his old friend Mr. Marriott on Sunday.

He could not however get anything very definite out of him. Mr. Marriott was always reserved and cautious, but he set him quite at rest as far as Evereld was concerned.

"She is perfectly safe and Sir Matthew can't touch her, for she is now a ward of Court," he said reassuringly. "I am not yet at liberty to speak to you as to details. I think however your old prejudice against Sir Matthew Mactavish was not without foundation. Unless I am much mistaken, he will soon be unmasked. Now to turn to quite another matter;—I understand from my client Lady Fenchurch, that you were present at Edinburgh last summer and met Sir Roderick. Tell me as carefully as you can all that passed while you were present."

Ralph related all that he could remember.

"We have exactly the same sort of evidence from many other witnesses of similar scenes," said the lawyer. "It will not be worth while calling you to appear at the trial. If you had witnessed any sort of violence, physical violence, we should subpœna you at once."

"When does the case come on?" said Ralph.

"Possibly next week, but there is always great uncertainty as to the exact date."

Ralph's thoughts naturally turned to Macneillie and he remembered his words about suspense being tolerable because it was always so largely mixed with hope.

The lawyer, however, who knew nothing of his reasons for taking interest in the Fenchurch case, fancied the shadow on his face was caused by anxiety for Evereld Ewart, and began to talk in a kindly way of her future.

"Of course," he said, "I can understand that under the circumstances it is hard for you not to be allowed even to know where Miss Ewart is. But it is safer that you should only communicate with her through Mr. and Mrs. Hereford. Who can tell that Sir Matthew may not pounce down on you again as he did at Rilchester. You know that she is safe and well and for the present that must suffice you. I have good reason to believe that the world will soon see Sir Matthew Mactavish in his true colours, and what will happen then no one can foretell. There

are storms ahead, but I think they are storms which will at any rate clear your way."

After this enigmatical speech Ralph went back to his work, somewhat perplexed, yet on the whole relieved and hopeful. There followed ten uneventful days and then one morning at Brighton, when he came down to breakfast and opened the paper, the first thing that caught his eye was a brief paragraph just before the leading article.

"In the Divorce Division yesterday the President and a Common Jury had before them the case of Fenchurch v. Fenchurch and Mackay. The adultery was not denied but the evidence failed to show legal cruelty on the part of the defendant. His Lordship was therefore unable to grant a decree nisi, but ordered a judicial separation with costs, and directed the amount to be paid into Court in a fortnight. Lady Fenchurch is well known to the public under her stage name of Miss Christine Greville."

"She is not yet free from that brute then," thought Ralph, a sick feeling of disappointment stealing over him as he realised how this news would darken his friend's sky, how it would for ever cheat him of his heart's desire. Hastily turning the paper to read the longer report, he found a whole column with the sensational heading, "Theatrical Divorce Suit," and feeling how it would all grate upon Macneillie, longed to keep the newspaper from him. "He shall at any rate have his breakfast in peace," he reflected, and crushing the paper in his hands he flung it into the fire.

The blaze had only just died down when Macneillie entered. He seemed in unusually good spirits; they had had good houses for three nights, moreover the weather was bright and clear, and the autumn sunshine of the south coast seemed doubly delightful after a gloomy tour in the midlands. Ralph thought he had never seen him look so young and buoyant and hopeful as just at that moment.

"Nothing like Brighton air for making a man hungry," said Macneillie devouring a plateful of porridge and helping himself to eggs and bacon. Have they brought round the letters from the theatre?"

Ralph handed him a budget, hoping that it would occupy him and make him forget the paper! But there were no letters of importance and Macneillie suddenly remembering that there might by chance be news of the Fenchurch case, which he was aware would probably come on during November, looked eagerly round the table.

"No newspaper?" he said. "How's that? The Smith boy must have played us false."

"I will run out and get one," said Ralph. "Will you have any of the local ones, too?"

"Yes, let us see what they have to say about 'The Winter's Tale,'" said Macneillie.

Ralph disappeared and Macneillie having finished his breakfast rang for the maid to clear.

"Have you taken our newspaper to any of the other lodgers by mistake?" he asked, beginning to feel impatient for it.

"No, sir," said the maid. "It's in here, at least—" looking round in surprise, "I know it was in here. Mr. Denmead must have taken it away. I saw him open it when I brought in the coffee."

Then in a flash it dawned upon Macneillie that Ralph had made away with the paper because it contained bad news.

"The boy couldn't stand seeing me come upon it suddenly," he thought to himself. "He wanted me to breakfast first. No one but Ralph would have thought of that! It is the worst news. I must be ready to bear it."

He stood by the window looking out at the great expanse of sea with its blue surface crisply ruffled by the fresh wind. Away to the left the graceful outline of the chain pier seemed to speak of old fashioned Brighton,

and it took him back to a time at least seventeen years ago in the very earliest days of his betrothal to Christine. How vividly the very tiniest details of the past came back to him. It had been in the days of æstheticism and high art colouring, a style which had suited Christine to perfection. He could remember, too, how at one of the little old-fashioned stalls he had bought her a dirk-shaped Scotch shawl brooch with a cairngorm stone in it; they had been far too poor in those days to dream of diamonds.

"She was only a child of seventeen," he thought to himself, "younger than Evereld Ewart; and I was not perhaps so very much older than that young fellow over the way. Yes, I was though—it is Ralph! How slowly he is walking. I believe the boy cares for me, he hates to be the bearer of ill news."

Ralph's usually cheerful face was curiously over-cast; he put down the papers, muttered something about "going to Brill's for a swim," and made for the door.

"Rehearsal at eleven, don't forget," said Macneillie, taking up the London paper with a steady hand.

He was glad to be alone, and in the midst of his grievous pain he felt grateful to Ralph for that little touch of considerateness which had spared him to some extent,—that strategem which had deferred his evil day. For as he had said his suspense had been largely mixed with hope, he had tried to face the other alternative but his very sense of justice had inclined him to be hopeful. It surely could not be that after these long years of suffering there should be no release? Max Hereford's words had chilled him for the time, but spite of them the hope had predominated. Now hope lay dead,—remorselessly slain by this unequal English law, which as a Scotsman seemed to him so extraordinary so intolerably unfair.

When a law is manifestly unjust,—when it flatly contradicts the foundation truth of Christianity that in Christ all are equal, that there is neither bond nor free, male nor

female—there comes to every one of strong passions the temptation to break the law. It is such a hard thing to wait patiently for the slow tedious process of reform, that the headstrong and the impetuous and the self-indulgent, and all who have not learnt a stern self-control, will often take the law into their own hands and defy the world. Macneillie reaped now the benefit of long years of self-repression and suffering. He saw very clearly that it is only justifiable to break the law of the land when it interferes with a higher duty; that to break even a bad law because it interfered with one's cherished desire could never be right; that to admit such a course to be right must sap the very foundations of society.

He saw it all plainly enough, yet, being human, could not at once shake himself free from the haunting consciousness that it lay in his power to choose present happiness, that in such a case the world would quickly condone the offence, and—greatest temptation of all—that he might shield Christine from the difficulties and dangers that were but too likely to assail one in her position.

Fortunately he had but little spare time on his hands, it was already a quarter to eleven and the mere habit of rigorous punctuality came to his help.

He walked down the parade, and the fresh air and the salt sea breeze invigorated him, his mind went back, sadly enough, yet with greater safety, from the future to the past, he seemed to be young once more and crossing this very Steyne with a tall golden-haired girl, who still retained something of the simplicity and innocence which she had brought with her from her quiet school in the country. She was beside him as he passed through Castle Square, beside him as he walked up North Street, beside him as he went along the Colonnade and entered the stage door of the very same theatre where they had acted together all those years ago.

There was a rehearsal of "Romeo and Juliet" chiefly

for the sake of Ralph, who was the understudy for Romeo and was obliged to play the part that evening owing to the illness of the Juvenile Lead—John Carrington.

Though of course perfect in his words, he needed a good deal of instruction, and Macneillie who always found him a pupil after his own heart, receptive, quick, eager to learn, and with that touch of genius which is as rare as it is delightful, forgot for a time all his troubles in the pleasure of teaching. And if, after the night's performance was over and his satisfaction with his pupil's success had had time to pass into the background, the old temptation came back once more, it came back with lessened power and found a stronger man to grapple with it.

No word passed between master and pupil as to the bad news the morning had brought, except that as Ralph, somewhat sooner than usual, bade the Manager good-night, Macneillie with his most kindly look said to him:—

"Your Romeo is the best thing you have done yet. The saying goes, you know, that no man has the power to act Romeo till he looks too old for the part; you have done something towards falsifying that axiom, and have cheered a dark day for me."

"I owe everything to you, Governor," said Ralph gripping his hand; and as he turned away he felt that he would have given up all and been content to play walking gentleman for the rest of his days if only Macneillie could be spared this grievous trial that had come upon him. He prayed for a reform of the law as he had never prayed in his life.

Left alone, Macneillie paced silently up and down the room, deep in thought. At length in the small hours of the night, he took pen and paper and wrote the following letter:—

"My dear Christine:

"It is impossible after our talk last summer in Scot-

land, to let such a time as this pass by in silence. You well know that I love you, nor will I pretend ignorance of your love for me. Let us be honest and face facts;—truth makes even what we are called on to bear more endurable. It is because I love and honour you that I write to bid you farewell. Let us at least be law-abiding citizens, even though the law be a one-sided, unjust law.

"I believe from my heart, that Christ, though disallowing divorce, with its natural sequence another marriage, for all the trivial reasons which the Jews were in the habit of putting forward, distinctly permitted them where a marriage had been broken by the faithlessness of a guilty partner. And assuredly He never set up one standard of morality for men and another for women; His words must apply equally to both.

"Doubtless some day the gross injustice of the existing English law will be removed, and as in Scotland there will be one and the same law for men and women in this matter. For that day I wait and hope. For many reasons I do not ask now to see you. Is it not better that we should not meet? I am convinced that it is safer and wiser that we should—both for our own sakes and for the sake of the profession—keep apart. Many may think this mere old-fashioned prejudice, but I believe I should serve you better at a distance than by dangling about you and so giving a handle to those scandal-mongers who love nothing so dearly as to make free with the name of some well-known actress.

"I dare not write more, save just to beg and pray that if there should ever be a time when you are in any danger or difficulty, and others—better fitted to serve because more indifferent—are not at hand, you will then turn to me for help.

"God bless you. Good bye.

"Yours ever,

"HUGH MACNEILLIE."

The letter reached Christine at Monkton Verney and the sight of it made the colour rush to her pale face. What she hoped, what she feared she scarcely knew herself, her heart was all in tumult. She read it in feverish haste, then again slowly and carefully, and yet a third time through fast gathering tears. How strangely it contrasted with the so-called love letters she had received from some men! And yet how infinitely more it moved her by its calmness and self-restraint!

"I was unworthy of you in the past," she thought. "But God helping me I will try to be more worthy now."

And without further delay,—dreading perhaps to put off the difficult task—she wrote him a letter which had in it the fervour of a new and strong resolve, and the beauty of a perfectly sincere response of soul to soul.

After that she plunged straight into business, and about noon sought out Miss Claremont and, walking with her in the quiet grounds near the ruined priory, told her of the plans she had made for the future.

"I have as you know made over the management of the theatre to Barry Sterne. He and his wife have been very good to me for many years, and it is better now that I should not again be burdened with all the cares of a Manageress. He proposes that I should take the part of the heroine in the new play that he is bringing out in January and I have just written to him accepting the proposal."

"Are you fit yet for work?" asked Miss Claremont looking a little doubtfully into her companion's face; it was curiously beautiful this morning, but not with the beauty of physical strength. Indeed Christine had never looked capable of bearing any very great strain and the last few days had taxed her powers to the utmost.

"I must get to work," she said quietly. "There is no safety in idleness. How odd it seems that a physical break-down comes generally through overwork, and a moral break-down through too little work."

"When must you leave us?" asked Miss Claremont.

"I think I had better go next week, and if you will keep Charlie a few days longer I can settle into that flat in Victoria Street which I have the refusal of. I shall manage very well there with my maid, and with Dugald to wait on Charlie; it will be necessary to live a quiet life for many reasons."

Miss Claremont assented, nor was it possible to raise any objection to her companion's plans. But she could not help secretly wondering whether, with all her good intentions, Christine was strong enough either in health or in character to live a life so beset with difficulties.

CHAPTER XXIX

"It seems indeed one of the deepest of moral laws, that under the stress of trial men will strongly tend at least to be whatever in quieter hours they have made themselves."—"The Spirit of Discipline."

DEAN PAGET.

DECEMBER was now half over and Macneillie's company had got as far as Southampton in their progress along the south coast. It was no slight pleasure to Ralph to find himself back in his old neighbourhood, and to act in the very theatre where long ago his father had taken him to see Washington in "The Bells." He had heard nothing more from Mr. Marriott, and Evereld's letters contained no reference to business matters, but were taken up with descriptions of life in the French country house, and of the happy time she was having with Bride O'Ryan.

It happened one day that as there was no rehearsal Ralph was able to walk over to Whinhaven. There were however very few of his old friends left in the neighbourhood.

Sir John and Lady Tresidder were in India, pretty Mabel Tresidder had married an officer and he had no idea of her present whereabouts, while even in the village there were many changes. Langston his coast-guard friend had got promotion and others had left the place or had died. He felt like a returned ghost as he wandered about the well-known lanes, and glanced at the familiar garden and at the unchanged outlines of the Rectory. A little child was playing with a pet rabbit on the lawn just as he had played in old times. He stood for a minute at the gate watching it with a strange feeling

at his heart which was not all pain, but rather a sort of tender regret and a glad sense of gratitude for a happy childhood of which no one could ever rob him. For the rest his return was like all such returns. He found the church unaltered, the houses bereft of some of their old inhabitants and the church-yard more full.

Ralph however was not a man who liked to linger among graves, he stood only for a minute by the tomb of his father and mother, and passed on to that little nook in the park which they had always called the "goodly heritage." It was as beautiful as ever, even in leafless December. The robins were singing blithely, the little brook rippled at the foot of the steep descent, and an adventurous squirrel had stolen out of his sleeping place to investigate his secret stores and to take a brief scamper among the branches. Some day, Ralph thought to himself, he would bring Evereld to see it all, and with that his thoughts travelled away into a happy future, and as he walked back to the nearest station regrets for the past were merged in the realisation that the best part of his life was still before him, and that many of his dark days had been lived through.

He was only just in time to catch the train and was hurriedly searching for a place when he was startled to hear himself called by his Christian name, and glancing round he saw someone beckoning to him from a carriage at a little distance. The door was opened for him, he stepped in, and to his amazement recognised in the dim light the well-known features of his Godfather. There was no other occupant of the carriage and Ralph remembering how they had parted at Rilchester would fain have beat a retreat.

"You are going to Southampton?" asked Sir Matthew. "I heard Macneillie's company was there and I came partly for the sake of seeing you."

"Do you bring news of Evereld?" asked Ralph eagerly.

"No," said Sir Matthew, "she has succeeded in baf-

fling me, you were right there. It is to her wilfulness that all my misfortunes are due."

Ralph bit his lip to keep back the retort that occurred to him. For a minute the two looked at each other searchingly. Sir Matthew felt a sinking of the heart as he noticed the angry light in his companion's eyes. Ralph on the other hand was perplexed by the pallor and dejection of his Godfather's face. The Company promoter seemed quite another man, he looked old and broken, all his suavity of manner, his business-like, capable air had vanished.

"I am ruined," he said; "worse than ruined—I am disgraced. At any moment I may be arrested unless I can succeed in leaving the country unnoticed."

Ralph listened to this startling announcement with an impassive face. He hardened his heart against the man who had dealt harshly with him.

"I suppose it means," he said, "that another of your Companies has failed and that this time you have suffered yourself, besides ruining hundreds as you ruined my father."

"God knows how I regretted his losses," said Sir Matthew and for the time there was a ring of genuine feeling in his voice. "It was for that reason I adopted you, that I educated you, that I took you straight to my own home. Have you forgotten that?"

"Sir, you never gave me a chance of forgetting it," said Ralph bitterly, all his worst self called out by contact with this man whom he detested. "Had I listened to your temptation I should now have been pledged to become a money-grubbing priest, a trader in holy things, a disgrace to the church."

He pulled himself up, recollecting that he was not much to boast of as it was—but a faulty, irritable mortal, full now of resentment, and hatred and contemptuous anger.

"Perhaps you were right," said Sir Matthew with a sigh. "I admit that I was harsh with you that day, and you have a right to hit me now that I am down."

Ralph instantly responded to this appeal as the astute Sir Matthew had calculated.

"Don't let us speak of the past," he said in an altered tone, "I owe you my education and I try to be grateful for that. Why did you wish to see me? What do you want with me?"

"We are almost at Southampton," said Sir Matthew glancing at the lights of the town. "Let me come to your rooms with you and I will there explain matters. Is this St. Denys? They stop for tickets here I suppose; have the goodness to give mine to the collector."

He moved to the further end of the carriage and began to unstrap some rugs from which he took a highland maud. He was still stooping over the straps when the tickets were collected. Then as soon as they moved on once more he began to swathe himself elaborately in his tartan.

"Can I see you alone?" he inquired.

"Yes," said Ralph, "I am usually with Mr. Macneillie, but he has friends in Southampton and is staying with them, so I happen to be quite alone."

"All the better" said Sir Matthew a touch of his old manner returning to him. "We will take a cab. I have only this gladstone with me."

And accepting Ralph's offer to carry his bag, he drew the tartan carefully over the lower part of his face and crossed the platform swiftly to the cabstand.

Ralph felt like one in a dream as they drove through the town to his lodgings, and several times he recalled the day when as a child he had last left Whinhaven, and Sir Matthew and he had sat thus side by side driving through the crowded London streets to Queen Anne's Gate.

The tables were turned indeed! It occurred to him even more strikingly as he took Sir Matthew into his snug little sitting-room in Portland Street and saw him warming his hands at the fire. Recollecting that his Godfather was a great tea-drinker, he rang at once and ordered the landlady to make some ready.

"That will be coals of fire on his head," he thought to himself with a smile as he recalled the afternoon when he had sat hungrily in Lady Mactavish's great drawing-room privileged only to hand cups to other people.

Sir Matthew was curiously silent, and as he sat by the fire seemed to care for nothing but the warmth and the food. By and bye, however, glancing at his watch he seemed to remember that his time was limited.

"You are acting this evening?" he inquired.

"Yes," said Ralph, "in the 'Rivals.' I must be at the theatre in three quarters of an hour. Can you tell me now what you want with me?"

"I want your help," said Sir Matthew. "At any moment I may be traced. Though I hope I have eluded pursuit and set them on a wrong track one can never tell in these days of telegrams and espionage. I don't ask much of you. All I want is this; go down to the agents' and take a place on board the Havre boat for to-night; let me shelter here until the passengers are allowed to go on to the steamer and, since you are a practised hand in making up, help me to disguise myself. I ask nothing but this."

The audacity of the request roused all Ralph's angry resentment again. He clenched his hands fiercely and began to pace up and down the room.

"You ask me to help you to escape," he said indignantly, "when I am certain that you richly deserve to be brought to justice!"

"I ask you," replied Sir Matthew, "to help your Godfather in his great need. To show a kindness to your father's old friend."

"You had no kindness for him," said Ralph. "How can you—how *dare* you come to me. You who have desolated homes and broken hearts! Why there are few things I should like better than to see you arrested and properly punished."

Sir Matthew's face grew whiter.

"Would you betray me?" he said, "after I have trusted you?"

"No," said Ralph indignantly, "certainly not. But I will not stir a finger to help you. How can you expect me to forget the way in which you have wronged Evereld?"

Sir Matthew's keen eyes scrutinised him closely for a minute; he was puzzled to know how much Ralph had learnt of the truth.

"Wronged her?" he said questioningly, "what do you mean?"

"I mean that you traded on her innocence and ignorance of the world; that you tried by the most foul means to force her and frighten her into marrying Bruce Wylie. That you drove her to escape from you, and that but for the care and kindness of others she might have got into great difficulties."

A look of relief crossed Sir Matthew's face. Ralph certainly did not know that he had speculated with Evereld's fortune and lost almost the whole of it.

"You misjudge me," he said assuming a tone of some dignity. "I cannot explain matters to you, but I had the best intentions in desiring to see Evereld safely married to Bruce Wylie. For the rest, it is highly probable that you will have your wish. You may even see me arrested to-night in Southampton. However I shall take good care not to remain long in custody. It will be merely the change of foregoing the journey to Havre and instead taking a much less costly ticket for a journey to the undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns."

He stood up and began slowly to button his overcoat. The easy tone in which he had made the quotation, and the look of quiet determination on his set face made a very painful impression on Ralph. His anger died away. Horror and perplexity suddenly overwhelmed him.

"What am I to do?" he thought desperately. "What would my father have done? If it were possible to imagine a man like Macneillie coming with such a request why I would shelter him and help him. Must I do as much for a man I loathe. It would be more just to let him be arrested? Why should I aid a guilty man to escape? It's conniving at his wickedness. But then again it's true that I ate his bread for years. If he should indeed take his own life I shall certainly wish I had helped him. Good Heavens! how is a fellow to see the right and wrong of such a case?" He looked round; Sir Matthew had folded his plaid about him and now moved towards the door.

"Good-bye Ralph," he said, "many thanks for your hospitality." But Ralph though he mechanically took the proffered hand spoke no farewell, merely held the hand in his grasp while over his curiously mobile face a hundred lights and shades succeeded one another.

"Wait," he said at length, "I cannot let you go like that, Sir Matthew." His perplexity and distress were so genuine that for the first time in all their intercourse the Company Promoter felt a sort of liking for this boy whom he had wronged and patronised, snubbed and educated, scolded and secretly hated. He saw that Ralph had all his father's gentleness and generosity, but a good deal more strength and warmth of temperament than the Rector had ever possessed.

In dire suspense he waited to know his fate. There was a silence of some minutes; then Ralph, who had moved across to the fireplace and had wrestled out his problem with arms propped on the mantelpiece and face

hidden, lifted up his head and once more met the gaze of his father's old friend. Sir Matthew was astonished to see that he looked pale and haggard with the struggle he had passed through.

"I will try to help you," he said simply.

"Then," said Sir Matthew with warmth, "I am justified in having come to you. You are—as I thought—your father's son. You are a true Denmead."

Ralph for the life of him could not help laughing at the words. "You told me that in a different tone at Rilchester," he remarked. "The Denmeads, I think you were good enough to say, were always unpractical fools, aiming at impossible ideals. I was angry then, but after all perhaps you are right. I believe I am a fool to help you, but just because you have so wronged us in the past I am afraid to refuse lest there should be anything of private spite or revenge in the refusal. What class do you wish to travel? I will go at once for your ticket."

"Take a second return to Havre, it may be a precaution," said Sir Matthew. "The steamer does not leave I think till 11.45. I did not come down by the boat train for that might very probably have been watched. How about disguise?"

"I will go to the theatre on my way back to you," said Ralph, "and bring a grey beard which I think is all that will be needed."

He hurried off, for there was not very much time to spare. Now that his decision was made he was comparatively at rest, and as he sped along the dark streets his thoughts went back to Whinhaven and all the quiet familiar scenes he had just visited. It was strange that Sir Matthew should have encountered him just as he returned from his old home, and perhaps, if the truth were known, the Company Promoter might never have gained his help had it not been for the softening influence of that visit to the old Rectory and the "goodly heritage."

Having secured the ticket, he made his way to the theatre, where, early though it was, Macneillie had already arrived and was discussing some knotty question with the assistant stage manager and the master carpenter. Ralph slipped by them and ran up to his dressing-room, unearthed the beard he wanted from his dress-basket, tucked his make-up box under his arm and hastened away.

"Where are you off to?" said Macneillie.

"Back again in ten minutes, Governor," he replied.

It was no use now to reflect how little he liked doing the work he had undertaken, and indeed when he was again in his own room a sort of pity for his godfather stirred once more in his heart. Sir Matthew was so broken down, so aged by all that he had gone through! The nervous haste with which he took the ticket, the hurried questions he put, were so unlike the hard business man of old times, that it was impossible not to feel some compassion for one who was the mere wreck of his former self.

Utterly exhausted by the high pressure at which he had lately been living, the sham philanthropist sat by the fire and allowed himself to be done for like a child, watching with a strange sort of admiration Ralph's intent face as with deft touches to the eyebrows and accentuating of certain wrinkles, he entirely transformed him. When the process of fixing on the beard with spirit-gum was over and he looked at himself in the glass Sir Matthew hardly recognised his own features, and saw before him a man at least twenty years his senior.

"Stoop a little more," said Ralph. "That is better. Now I don't think even Lady Mactavish would know you."

Sir Matthew sighed heavily.

"It's mostly for her sake that I care to escape to-night," he said with a touch of real feeling in his manner. "She will always be grateful to you, Ralph, for helping me."

"I will order them to bring you some dinner at eight," said Ralph, "and if you like I can drive down to the docks with you at eleven or a little after."

Sir Matthew caught at this suggestion, and Ralph having finished his work at the theatre, refused two or three invitations to supper and hurried back to wind up the most curious service he had yet been called upon to render to any man.

"Don't think too harshly of me," said Sir Matthew as they drove down to the starting-place of the Havre steamer. "Remember that I always expected the speculation to succeed, that I still think I could have recovered myself if only things had not all conspired against me at the same time. You Denmeads can't understand the temptations that assail an average man in the city. You were born without the love of money in you, and whatever happens you are always strictly honourable. Some men are made so. Had I not felt implicit trust in you how should I dare have put myself now in your power? You own that you would like to see me arrested and punished, but I know that you won't betray me for all that."

"I don't wish to see you punished now," said Ralph, "and of course I can't betray you. But perhaps the best way after all would be for you to give yourself up to justice."

Sir Matthew broke into a laugh.

"You might be your father sitting there and talking! It's exactly what he would have said. My dear fellow your ideals are above me, and they are about as little likely to be adopted by ordinary men of the world as the ideals in Plato's republic. I shall certainly not give myself up. I shall instead try my very best, for the sake of others, to recoup my losses and to start afresh."

A curiously sanguine look crept over his worn face, and Ralph felt certain that like a gambler he would return as soon as possible to his great game of speculation, very

likely persuading himself, with the ease of one who has posed hypocritically for many years, that he did it all from the purest philanthropic motives.

"You had better not come on board with me," he said as they drew near to the docks. "And on the whole perhaps I had better not take this tartan with me, it is too marked. I will bequeath it to you. Good-bye Ralph. Many thanks to you for what you have done for me."

With the first hearty grip of the hand he had ever given his godson he bade him farewell and passing up the gangway on board the steamer disappeared from view. The cold wintry wind came sweeping over the water; Ralph shivered and was glad enough to wrap the highland maud about him as he paced up and down watching to see the actual start of the Havre boat.

There was a bustle of arrival as the passengers were transferred from the boat train; he stood in the shadow watching them, and apparently another man, unobtrusively dressed, was engaged in the same occupation. Ralph felt sure that the fellow was a detective; he folded the plaid more closely about his mouth and pulled his hat over his eyes; the man furtively glanced at him and drew a few steps nearer, whereupon the spirit of mischief and love of acting overcame all other recollections, and Ralph as though most desirous of eluding pursuit, slipped quietly away into the darkness and vanished in the crowd. The detective, with all his suspicions aroused, gave chase, but presently coming to a place where two streets branched off, was baffled for a moment.

In a deep porch of one of the houses close by, a young man stood bareheaded, sheltering a flickering fusee with his hat while he tried to light his pipe.

"Seen a man wrapped in a plaid go by this way?" asked the detective panting.

"He has not gone past here," said Ralph coolly.

The man took the other street and just at that moment

the sounding of a steam whistle and the chiming of a clock in a neighbouring house told Ralph that it was a quarter to twelve and that the boat for Havre was safely underweigh.

He quietly picked up the highland maud from the well shaded corner of the porch where it had been snugly tucked behind a pillar, and then walked back to Portland Street musing over Sir Matthew's fate and wondering what news the morning would bring.

CHAPTER XXX

"O, gear will buy me rigs o' land,
And gear will buy me sheep and kye;
But the tender heart o' leesome luve,
The gowd and siller canna buy.
We may be poor—Robie and I;
Light is the burden luve lays on,
Content and luve bring peace and joy,
What mair hae queens upon a throne?"—BURNS.

RALPH slept late the next day and only escaped a fine at Rehearsal by the merciful rule which permitted ten minutes' grace.

"You have done it by the skin of your teeth," said Macneillie with a laugh, "but of course you found the newspaper absorbing."

"I have not even seen it. What is the news?"

"There's a warrant out for the arrest of Sir Matthew Mactavish on a charge of swindling, and Mr. Bruce Wylie they say is already in Holloway gaol having been arrested last night."

"Good heavens!" said Ralph, "Bruce Wylie in prison!"

"What matters more," said Macneillie, "is that some South African company of which they were the leading directors has failed. And this following closely on the failure of that other Company with which they were connected will probably cause more failures to follow. Thousands will be ruined. Mr. Marriott was right enough when he darkly hinted to you that startling revelations were in store. Well we must get to work. What a mercy it is that Miss Ewart is safely out of her guardian's power."

A sudden panic seized Ralph. What if Sir Matthew were to come across Evereld in France? He had no idea whereabouts she was but for the first time he wondered whether any possible scheme for getting her again into his power could have occurred to the Company Promoter.

On the previous night such a thought had never entered his head, he had adopted the more reasonable conclusion that Sir Matthew chose Havre merely as a possible starting place for America or some distant port where he could safely shelter. It needed all his patience and self-control to wait through the tedious rehearsal, and the instant he was free he ran to the telegraph office and begged Mr. Marriott to send him tidings as soon as possible with regard to Evereld.

The answer set him at rest before the evening's performance. Evereld was safe and well and Mr. Marriott begged that Ralph would if possible spend the following Sunday at his house since there were many things to discuss.

It was now only Wednesday so he had still some time to wait, but the worst of his suspense was over and it was with a very buoyant heart that early on Sunday morning he presented himself at the old lawyer's house. After a pleasant breakfast with the kindly ladies who had always taken an interest in his career, he was carried off to the study by Mr. Marriott for a business talk.

"I asked you to come up to town," said the lawyer, "because you have a right to know the whole truth of things. Sir Matthew Mactavish was not only a scheming speculator, he was a fraudulent trustee. Miss Ewart's affairs were entirely in his hands, and Bruce Wylie her solicitor aided and abetted the speculations which have dissipated her fortune."

"The brutes!" said Ralph. "Still I can forgive them that. It's their abominable scheme for trapping her into a marriage that I can't forgive."

"Perhaps you hardly realise things yet," said the lawyer, "I mean exactly what I say. Instead of being an heiress she has now nothing whatever left but a couple of hundred a year which, being her mother's property, and in the funds, could not be tampered with."

"If she is much troubled about it I am sorry," said Ralph. "But personally I don't care a straw. No one will be able to say now that I was running after her fortune. How soon do you think we might be married? There is nothing to wait for now."

"Well, you will have to get the leave of the Lord Chancellor, but I don't suppose he will disapprove," said the lawyer with a smile, "if you are in a position to support a wife that is. I can't see any objection to your marrying before long if Miss Ewart desires it. Go and talk it over with Mr. Hereford, she is under his guardianship and he is in town till to-morrow evening."

"What good luck," said Ralph. "I will go round at once and try to catch him before he goes out."

"Very well. We shall meet again later on then," said the old lawyer kindly. "We can put you up for the night and then you can let me know what arrangement you and Mr. Hereford have arrived at. I will walk round with you to Grosvenor Square; these bright frosty mornings are tempting."

Ralph received a friendly greeting from Max Hereford who was amused by his extreme haste and anxiety to win the Lord Chancellor's consent to his marriage with Evereld.

"You see, we have been practically engaged for several months," he argued, "and I shall never have a moment's peace about her while she is drifting about the world. Who can tell whether we have heard the last of Sir Matthew Mactavish even now! It's unbearable to think that I don't even know where she is."

"Well I can set you at rest on that point," said Max Hereford laughing. "She is on her way to Ireland, and my wife will take the greatest care of her."

"She has left France?"

"Yes, I went myself to bring her home and my sister-in-law came with her. Dermot will spend the winter in

the south and I am taking the two girls across to Dublin to-morrow night. They are here now."

Ralph's face was a sight to see.

"You must talk to her and find out what her wishes are," said his host pleasantly. "I am the last man to advise a prolonged engagement. And since Marriott has told you that Miss Ewart is no longer an heiress but has been robbed by those precious scoundrels of almost the whole of her fortune, I think it only remains for you two to decide upon your own course of action, subject of course to the approval of the Lord Chancellor. She shall always find a home with us, as she very well knows, if you think it advisable to wait."

"I don't think it advisable," said Ralph eagerly. "But of course I must ask whether she is really willing to put up with the discomforts of a wandering life."

"I will go and find her," said Max Hereford, "and you can have an interview in peace."

Evereld and Bride were in the great drawing-room, both looking rather pale and tired after their long journey.

"Time to go to church?" asked Bride with a portentous yawn.

"No my dear, you would only go to sleep," he said teasingly, "as your brother-in-law and Evereld's guardian I strictly prohibit church-going this morning. Rest and be thankful, and don't forget that you will be travelling all to-morrow night. Evereld, if you have energy enough for the interview, Mr. Marriott has sent someone round on business. Should you mind just going down to the library? He wants to put a few questions to you."

Evereld started up, looking rather nervous.

"How odd of him to come about business on a Sunday morning," she said. "I hope he is not an alarming sort of person. Will you not come down with me?"

"Well I think on the whole you had better be alone,"

said Max Hereford with profound gravity. "I always think it is a mistake to have a third person at an interview. I should only make you more nervous."

She said no more, but set off bravely for what to her was no slight ordeal, her first business interview.

The touch of dignity, which even as a child she had possessed, was more noticeable now in the poise of her head and in her whole manner; but the face was not in the least altered: it was the same sweet gentle face which had for so long reigned in Ralph's heart.

He sprang up to greet her, and Evereld with a joyous laugh ran towards him.

"Oh, Ralph! is it you?" she cried, radiant with happiness. "What a tease Mr. Hereford is! He told me it was someone from Mr. Marriott on business!"

Ralph laughed as he released her from his embrace. "We have not begun in a very business like way!" he said, "but it is quite true that I have come from Mr. Marriott's house. He has been telling me of this fraudulent trustee who has treated you so shamefully. Are you very angry with those two rogues? How does it feel to be robbed of a fortune?"

"It feels anything but pleasant," said Evereld warmly. "But what I find it hardest to forgive is the hypocrisy. Of course it is sad to think that the money which my father and grandfather earned by such hard work has all been wasted, specially as I thought it would have been useful to you some day. Do you realise, dear, that I shall be quite poor?"

"I don't care a fig about that," said Ralph. "But when I remember that those vile knaves nearly succeeded in trapping you into a marriage which must have been lifelong misery to you, then—well, I feel like killing."

"But they never did nearly succeed, Ralph," she said slipping her hand into his. "I would have died sooner than marry Bruce Wylie. Oh, how good it is to be here

with you, and quite safe! That time at Glion was dreadful."

"Do you know that you at nineteen have baffled two of the cleverest rogues of the present time?" said Ralph. "It is delicious to think of that. How did you think of such a plan and carry it out so pluckily?"

"I don't know how," said Evereld. "But I knew that somehow I must get away out of their power. Then, when, I was so very unhappy this thought suddenly came to me of Bride O'Ryan and Aimée Magnay in Auvergne, and after that it was all quite simple—except, indeed, the Continental Bradshaw which nearly drove me distracted!"

"You told me in your letter about that jolly old priest who took care of you. We must go and see him some day. I should like to thank him."

"Yes, I should so like you to see him, and you must go to Mabillon. It is such a dear old place. I have grown to love it almost as if it were my own home."

"Don't you think we ought now to come to the business part of the interview?" said Ralph with a mirthful glance. "Do you think, darling, that you are really willing to become the wife of an actor who has still to fight his way up the ladder? Remember that as yet you are quite free, that there is no engagement even between us."

"The engagement really began for me that Sunday at Southbourne," said Evereld shyly.

"And for me, too," said Ralph. "But think once more, darling, and try to realise what it will mean. Ours will have to be, at any rate for some time, a wandering life. For Macneillie has been so very good to me that I must stay with him and try to repay him a little for all his training. Even if a London engagement were to be offered me, and that is not likely, I should feel bound to stay with him as long as he cares to have me."

"Oh, yes of course," said Evereld. "Why, we owe

everything to him! I wonder if he would like——" she broke off rather abruptly.

"What were you going to propose?" said Ralph trying to read her face. There was a wistful look in it now which he did not understand.

"Only I have felt so dreadfully sorry for him since the Fenchurch Case. Of course I heard people talking about it, and I can't help fancying that he must still care for Miss Greville."

"Yes," said Ralph. "It is very rough on him."

"I shouldn't like to take you away from him, Ralph," she continued, "specially just now, for I could see quite well at Southbourne that you are almost like a son to him; you don't know what things he said about you when you were talking to Mrs. Hereford that morning. He would miss you dreadfully. Do you think we could still be in the same house with him when we are married? Or should I bother him?"

"I don't think you would be likely to do that," said Ralph smiling. "When I tell him about our marriage I will see how the land lies. I wonder, darling, whether you will be able to put up with all the discomforts of life in a travelling company?"

"Why it will be the greatest fun!" cried Evereld.

"Well, I have found it a very jolly life, but, you know, wayfaring men naturally have to put up with some discomforts. You will find the endless packing and unpacking, and the settling into fresh lodgings once a week an awful bore."

"But I shall have you, dear," she said happily. "And nothing else will matter much."

"Then it only remains for us to win the Lord Chancellor's consent and to tell Macneillie, and find out when he can spare me for a few days. You won't make me wait long will you?"

"I think Parliament meets on the 5th," said Evereld,

"and we are to come back from Ireland in the first week of February. I know the Hereford's will let me be married from this house, and we will have a quiet wedding. You see we are both of us alone in the world; except the Marriotts and Mr. Macneillie there is really no one to ask, for of course the Mactavishs will keep away from town for some time to come."

"I wonder what will become of poor Lady Mactavish," said Ralph. "I fancy she has something of her own, so as far as money goes she will be all right. But how she will feel the disgrace!"

"I'm not at all sure," said Evereld, "that now real trouble has overtaken her she won't give up grumbling. If not I am sorry for Janet for she will have to bear the brunt of it. Oh, Ralph! what a strange world it is! Only last spring the Mactavishs seemed at the very height of their prosperity, and were so enchanted about Minnie's engagement, and now here is Sir Matthew ruined and disgraced, and Bruce Wylie in prison."

"Well," said Ralph, "it's a much better fate than the one they tried to force upon you. It's not of them I think, but of the thousands they have cruelly injured: if you had seen your father die of a broken heart as I saw mine, you would think prison and exile a very light punishment for those cursed speculators."

"Yes," assented Evereld, "it was more of the suddenness of the change I was thinking. Last spring, too, you were tramping through Scotland, ill and half starved, and now——"

"Now I am the happiest man in the world," said Ralph his face aglow with ardent love.

And after that they forgot all the troubles of the past and sat weaving delicious plans for the future, and enjoying to the full the happy present.

The next day Ralph rejoined the company in the Isle of Wight and in the evening, when supper was

over, he with some trepidation told his story to the Manager.

Macneillie had of late been very silent and depressed and Ralph hated having to speak of his own happiness to one who was in the depths of dejection. However with an effort he broke the ice.

"I saw Miss Ewart's new guardian Mr. Hereford in town," he began, "and it seems that almost the whole of her fortune has been lost by that swindling trustee of hers. She has nothing left but a couple of hundred a year which luckily was tied up and out of Sir Matthew's reach."

"The scoundrel!" exclaimed Macneillie, "so he had the audacity to put her fortune into his rotten companies I suppose?"

"Yes. However it's an ill wind that blows nobody good. The fortune is gone but so is Sir Matthew, and the new guardian permits our engagement and sees no reason why it should be a long one, he is distantly related to the Lord Chancellor and thinks he will consent to our being married shortly."

"And what does Miss Ewart say? have you heard from her?"

"I have seen her, she was passing through London on her way to Ireland. Well, she talked very sensibly about the money, had hoped it might be useful to us, but chiefly looked on it in my fashion as a hindrance to our immediate marriage now safely removed."

Macneillie's grave face was suddenly convulsed with merriment. He laughed aloud at this view of the case.

"Was there ever such a couple of babies!" he said. "Pray how do you mean to live?"

"On my salary to be sure," said Ralph, "and on the two hundred which Evereld has left."

"You are over young yet to get much of a salary in London, and, even if we succeeded in getting you an en-

gagement there, who can tell how long you would be secure of keeping it? Then living and rent is much higher in London, and Miss Ewart has never been used to anything except the very best."

"But why do you speak of London?" said Ralph. "Do you mean to give me the sack, Governor, if I marry?"

Macneillie turned and looked at him in some surprise.

"I naturally concluded that having gained some experience with me you meant to go off at the earliest opportunity. That is the way of the world. You don't mean that you intend to bring your wife to travel with us?"

"Why not? It is often done. Harden's wife used to go about with him, they say."

"Oh, of course it is often done, but after the sort of life Miss Ewart has been accustomed to——"

Ralph broke in eagerly.

"We talked it over very carefully, I told her exactly what it would be like, and she is only longing for the fun of it all. Indeed she made a very audacious proposal."

"What was that?" said Macneillie pleased and interested in spite of himself.

"Her old hero worship of you is as keen as ever, she thinks nothing would be more delightful than to housekeep for you, and pour out the tea—women always think they do those things best—It's quite a mistake! Then, too, she has a notion that you might miss me if we went off into rooms by ourselves. I told her that was nonsense."

"No," said Macneillie, "it's true enough, my boy. I should miss you very much. But all the same I hardly know whether it is fair to you both to spoil the early days of your married life. I am growing a very 'dour' sort of man and that's a fact."

"You have been a second father to me," said Ralph,

"and Evereld knows that: so if, as she says, we shall not bother you——"

Macneillie laughed. "If she can put up with a 'dour' man as third fiddle, and promise to speak the truth when his playing jars too much with your harmony I should like nothing better than to have you both with me. To tell the truth Ralph I dread being alone just now. By the bye, have you heard Jack Carrington say anything about his part in the new play? Brinton had a notion he didn't take to it."

"Yes, I heard him say it didn't suit him," said Ralph. "I don't see why. It seems to me rather a decent part."

"I'm not at all sure that he will renew his engagement," said Macneillie. "And if he leaves, why there is no reason at all why you should not become Juvenile Lead, and I could raise your salary to five pounds a week. However that is between ourselves. As for Carrington he has been with me three years and is likely enough to get a good berth somewhere before long. When do you two hope to be married?"

"Early in the spring if possible," said Ralph.

"Well, I would never counsel a long engagement," said Macneillie with a sigh. "You are not obeying the advice of Mrs. Siddons but, after all, there are exceptions to every rule, and Miss Ewart is one of a thousand. By the bye, I never told you—little Miss Ivy Grant wrote to ask if I could give her an engagement and I have offered her the part of the French girl. She seems to me to have exactly the face for it."

"Oh, it will suit her down to the ground!" said Ralph looking pleased. "I am glad poor Ivy has left the Delaines, she was too good for them. Evereld will be glad that she is to be one of the Company."

CHAPTER XXXI

"So let my singing say to you,
'Our hearts are pilgrims going home;
Love's kingdom shall most surely come
To all who seek Love's will to do.'"
"Daydreams."—A. GURNEY.

IN the course of the next four months Ralph's powers of letter-writing improved amazingly, and thanks to those love letters and to the bright merry life in the Hereford household Evereld's engagement proved a happy one although she and her lover could only spend two Sundays together during the whole time. They knew each other so well already however that there was no risk of any misunderstanding between them, and the waiting-time was too short to be very irksome.

As for Bride O'Ryan she proved herself a friend worth having, threw herself into all Evereld's interests with delightful eagerness, and teased her just enough to add a little salt to the entertainment.

The Lord Chancellor kept them for some time in suspense, and furnished Bride with endless food for merriment. "He is a very formidable guardian," she protested, "and when once you get into his clutches it's very hard indeed to get out again. I wonder you dared to appeal to him."

"It was the only thing to be done," said Evereld, "but I do wish he would be quick and give his consent."

"I have always heard," said Bride provokingly, "that when once things get into chancery they stay there for years and years. Remember how it was in *Bleak House*."

"Well at any rate Mrs. Hereford says the Lord Chancellor is most kindhearted," said Evereld. "And I know

he is fond of reading novels, so he ought to take an interest in the romances of real life. And particularly he ought to like Ralph, for they say he himself had dreadful struggles at the beginning of his career when he was a young barrister on circuit."

However at length the consent was given and it was arranged that, as Macneillie's company were not giving any performances in Holy Week, Ralph and Evereld should be married on Palm Sunday.

Evereld like a wise little woman was determined not to waste her substance in the purchase of a trousseau which would be an endless trouble in their wandering life.

"I have plenty of clothes already," she protested. "All I shall need is a nice warm cloak in which I can walk to the theatre in the evening—a respectable dark sort of garment—and of course my wedding dress; I won't be a frumpy bride in a travelling costume."

"No, have a gown like the bride in Blair Leighton's picture 'Called to arms,'" said Ralph who had come up from Bristol to spend a Sunday at the Hereford's directly they had returned to London. It's a thousand times prettier than any of the ugly modern fashions."

Evereld did not know the picture but she promised to do her best to copy it, and with the help of a clever American maid of Mrs. Hereford's, and Bridget's ready assistance, and the advice of all the female members of the household, her skilful fingers succeeded in turning out a very good reproduction of the artist's design at about a fifth of the cost of an ordinary wedding dress.

"Even had I not lost my money," she said to Bride, "I don't think I could have borne to spend much just on clothes when so many people are ruined and half starving from the failure of all these companies."

That was the greatest shadow that was cast over the happiness of the two lovers. The appalling accounts of the trouble caused by Sir Matthew's wrong doing, the knowledge that many of the victims had literally died

from the shock, that many more had lost their reason, that thousands were reduced to dire poverty and distress could not but affect them.

Evereld was touched too by a very kindly but sad letter from Lady Mactavish. It contained one sentence which puzzled her not a little.

"What does Lady Mactavish mean by speaking of the help you gave Sir Matthew?" she enquired, a week before their wedding day, as she and Ralph sat together in the library where in December they had had that first "business interview."

"What does she say about it?" asked Ralph.

"Here is her letter, it is a message to you;—'Tell Ralph that I shall never cease to be grateful to him for the help he gave my husband. It saved his life."

"Well," said Ralph, "I suppose I am free to speak of it since she mentioned it to you. He came to me at Southampton, indeed I met him on my way back from Whinhaven," and going through the whole story he made her understand exactly what had taken place. "To this day I don't know whether I did right. But if the same thing were to happen again I should still probably help him. It was the dread of letting one's private hatred and resentment bias one against helping a desperate man. As a matter of fact he has by no means escaped punishment by escaping from England. I don't believe there is a corner of the earth where he will long remain unmolested. He will lead a miserable, hunted life far worse than the life Bruce Wylie leads in gaol, and with nothing really to look forward to. But I think he was in earnest when he said that night he would put an end to himself if they arrested him. And I have never regretted the little I did to shield him from discovery."

"You wouldn't have been yourself if you had acted differently," said Evereld. "But it must have been hard work to decide."

"I hope I may never again have such a decision to make," said Ralph. "And all the time there was the maddening remembrance of what he had made you suffer. What a strange, complex character he had: there was a sort of greatness about him all the time. I suppose that was how he deceived people in such an extraordinary way,—he managed to deceive himself. Even now a sort of panic seizes me lest he should somehow interfere between us. I shall never feel at rest about you till we are safely married."

"Next Sunday," she whispered. "Where shall you be all this week?"

"At Manchester," he replied "and as ill luck will have it there is a matinée of the new play and an evening performance of 'Much Ado' next Saturday. However there will be plenty of time to sleep in the train, and I will meet you somewhere for the early service."

"Let it be at the Abbey then, that seems specially to belong to us. Bride and I often go there and we can meet you just by the Baptistry at the west end."

"What time is the wedding to be? I have not even learnt that yet," he said laughing.

"Mrs. Hereford arranged that it should be at two, that will leave us plenty of time to catch our train, and I have not told anyone where we mean to go. That is our secret."

"Yes, we will keep that dark," said Ralph. "Otherwise it may be creeping into the papers. Did you see there was a paragraph about Sir Matthew Mactavish's late ward in yesterday's 'Veracity'?"

"Yes. We couldn't help laughing over it, but I hope Janet and Minnie won't see it. Oh, Ralph! what a nightmare the past is to look back on! and how happy and safe I am with you!"

Now that all was arranged, she seemed perfectly at rest, able even to enjoy all the manifold little plans and

the cheerful bustle that heralded the wedding-day. But Ralph down at Manchester spent a feverishly anxious week, and found it difficult indeed to concentrate his mind on his work. Most managers would have lost all patience with him, but Macneillie with the genial breadth of mind and the rare patience that characterised him took it all very quietly, and perhaps in his secret soul rather enjoyed the sight of such unusual and unsullied enthusiasm.

By the time Saturday arrived, Ralph had become very "ill to live with." He wandered about the house imagining that he was busy packing but contriving to forget half his possessions. He could hardly stir without singing or whistling, and he would have neglected to put in an appearance at "Treasury" if Macneillie himself had not reminded him.

"You are like your namesake Sir Ralph the Rover," said the manager, who had been answering his correspondence as well as he could to a running accompaniment of Ralph's voice.

> "He felt the cheering power of spring,
> It made him whistle, it made him sing—"

"We won't finish the quotation. But my dear fellow you will be quite played out to-morrow if you go on at this rate."

"How about the train?" said Ralph. "That's the thing that bothers me. Shall we ever get through to-night in time to catch the mail?"

"For pity's sake don't begin to fuss about that already!" said Macneillie with a comical expression about the corners of his mouth. "It's a mercy that marrying and giving in marriage are not every-day occurrences or a manager's life would not be worth living."

"I'll promise never to do it again, Governor," said Ralph with mock penitence.

"Well well," said Macneillie with a patient shrug of the shoulders, "it all comes in the day's work. You will understand now how to render Claudio's words 'Time goes on crutches till love have all his rites.'"

Ralph thought it extremely obnoxious of the Manchester folk to have petitioned for a performance of "Much ado about Nothing" on this particular day, and though he acted Claudio very well it was always to him an uncongenial character. Macneillie's Benedick was however considered one of his best parts and though perhaps he enjoyed playing it as little just then as Ralph enjoyed going through the wedding scene on the eve of his own marriage, he was the last man to let his private feelings interfere with his work either as actor or as manager.

The play was carefully rendered, and after a most uncomfortable rush and scramble, Ralph, thanks chiefly to the help of his many friends in the company, found himself at the station just as the Scotch mail steamed up to the platform. Whether Macneillie would arrive in time seemed doubtful, however as the guard's whistle sounded he emerged from the booking office, and with his usual imperturbably grave face sprang in while the train moved off.

Ivy Grant and Myra Brinton had packed up a most tempting little supper for the two and had taken care to see that it was not forgotten in the hurry of the last moment; and Macneillie, who always retained the power of enjoying a holiday under any circumstances, proved a very genial companion until the advent of another passenger at Crewe, when they relapsed into silence and settled down to sleep.

The night was stormy; torrents of rain washed the windows, and the wind howled and moaned as the train sped on through the darkness. Ralph tried in vain to follow the example of his two companions who, quite oblivious of their surroundings slept composedly through all the

din. He was far too much excited to lose consciousness even for a minute. The carriage lamp was shaded and, in the dim light, visions of Evereld kept rising before him.

She was a little girl once more, in a black frock, and with soft, bright hair falling about her shoulders.

"Are you not hungry?" she said to him confidentially as they stood together, strangers and yet somehow already friends, in a drearily grand London drawing-room.

Again she was sitting beside him on the stairs, a fairy-like little figure in white, eating ice pudding supplied to them by the goodnatured Geraghty. "I somehow think your father and mine will be talking together to-night?" she said, her sweet blue eyes looking as though they could see right into that spirit world of which she spoke.

On thundered the train, and yet another vision rose before Ralph. He was in Westminster Abbey and there before him he suddenly saw a face which took his heart by storm—the face of his old playfellow grown into gentle gracious womanhood. Then the same face, but with wistful love-lit eyes was lifted up to his outside the house in Queen Anne's Gate kindling hope in his heart and filling him with a glow of happiness which had carried him through the pain of the parting. These same love-lit eyes and a yet more wonderful response of soul to soul rose in vision before him as he recalled a certain summer afternoon by the sea shore. What did it matter to him that the cold spring wind raged round the carriage piercing every crevice, or that the hail-stones rattled angrily against the glass! He was far away from it all, seeing blue waves and the mellow brown side of a boat and Evereld's blushing face. The memory of that August day lasted him all the rest of the way to London; then in the chilly dawn they made their way to the nearest hotel, where the order of things was reversed for Ralph at last fell sound asleep on a sofa in the reading room and it was

Macneillie who was wakeful and saw visions of the past—visions that he dared not dwell upon because with them there came the maddening recollection that he was close to Christine, that it would be the easiest thing in the world, yet the most fatal, to go that afternoon and call upon her. What was she doing? How did she struggle on in the difficult life on which she had embarked? All the craving to know, all the longing to serve her must be crushed down in his heart. Alone she must dree her weird. Alone he must bear the anguish of her pain and his own bitter loss.

Almost involuntarily, those hard views of God from which years ago he had been rescued by Thomas Erskine's book "The Spiritual Order," returned now to him, flooding his mind with rebellious thoughts.

Why did all this misery come to him? Why were the mistakes and sins of others visited upon him? Why were the ways of God so unequal? Other men prospered. Other men had the desire of their hearts granted. Why was he for ever to be thwarted? For years he knew that he had made strenuous efforts to live uprightly, yet there seemed nothing before him but sorrow; while over yonder there was a mere boy of one and twenty about to gain after the briefest of struggles the woman he loved.

The Tempter had however defeated his own object by introducing the thought of Ralph Denmead. Macneillie's heart was too large for jealousy to harbour in it. Jealousy can only rest long and comfortably in narrow, and cramped hearts where self love and petty absorption in trifles has contracted the space.

As he glanced across the room he saw that the sunlight was streaming full upon the sleeper, he got up and lowered the blind pausing for a minute by the sofa to look at his companion. Ralph was sound asleep, and his untroubled, boyish face was worth looking at if only for its peace. To Macneillie it suggested many thoughts.

He remembered his first impression of Ralph, lying in the last stage of misery on the banks of the Leny, and he delighted to think that partly by his aid the lad had battled through his difficulties and had got his foot firmly planted on the ladder of success.

There is nothing so strange in life as the manner in which a kindly deed re-acts in a thousand subtle ways on the doer. And now, as had been the case before, Macneillie was lured back to life by the one he had helped long ago. The hard thoughts passed, he stood there in the bright spring morning strong once more in the belief that the eternal patience of the All-Father schools each son in the best possible way.

Sitting down to the writing-table he filled up a couple of hours with answering the letters of the previous day, then when the time came, set off with Ralph to the Abbey and finding the way to the Baptistry unbarred waited there beside the busts of Maurice and Kingsley, lifted a degree nearer to that Light and Love of which their epitaphs spoke by the struggle he had just passed through.

They were joined here by Mrs. Hereford, Bride, and Evereld, and Macneillie thought he had never seen anything more winning than Evereld's eager welcome of her lover. He felt very much in harmony with their happiness as they all went together into the choir, and indeed throughout the day the depression which had overwhelmed him since he had received the bad news at Brighton was banished by the unalloyed bliss of the two who were just stepping into their goodly heritage of mutual love and companionship.

It was a thoroughly unconventional wedding with merely the merry Irish family in the house, with Bride and the two little Hereford girls for bridesmaids, and Macneillie and an old school fellow who had returned from Canada just in time to be Ralph's best man, as the only outsiders.

Of course, when at two o'clock they drove to the church, it was crowded with spectators, for the marriage of the heiress who had been defrauded of her fortune by Sir Matthew Mactavish had found its inevitable way into the hands of the paragraph-mongers. But then, as Macneillie remarked, a marriage ought to take place before a congregation, and it would have been a thousand pities if this particular marriage had been smuggled through in secret at some chilly hour of the morning in an empty church.

"As it was," he added, "some idle London folk had the chance of singing 'All people that on earth do dwell' to the old hundredth, and that's a chance that doesn't often come to us in these degenerate days of flabby modern hymns. All the women, moreover, will go away persuaded in their own minds that the conventional wedding dress of modern days is ugly and that the old-world dress of Mrs. Ralph Denmead is far more artistic."

There was one thing, however, which baffled the Press. It described the service with gusto, and gave the most elaborate details as to the dresses, but it could not discover where the Bride and Bride-groom intended to spend the honeymoon. It was reduced at length to the desperate expedient of a good round lie, and said that they left *en route* for the continent.

Ralph and Evereld, who had kept this detail entirely to themselves, laughed contentedly as they read this fable in their snug little sitting-room at Stratford-on-Avon.

"We knew a trick worth two of that," said Ralph. "Fancy rushing off to the Continent for a week! It never seemed to occur to anyone that Stratford was the ideal place for an actor's honeymoon. We are not going to leave our Mecca entirely to the Yankees."

Evereld hoped she thought enough of Shakspere as they wandered about the quaint old place and enjoyed the bright spring weather in the lovely country around.

"It was a delightful thought of yours to come here," she said, "one likes to have a beautiful background for the happiest time of one's life. But after all, darling, it's very much in the background, we should really be as happy in the black country."

"Of course," said Ralph laughing. "And there'll be plenty of the black country to come by and bye. You have no idea what dreary towns we have sometimes to go to. Are you not afraid when you look forward to that sort of thing?"

"Not a bit," she said with a radiant face. "Don't I know now what the song means when it speaks of 'The desert being a paradise'? That used to seem such nonsense in the old days! But with you Ralph——"

She was interrupted. They had been walking beside the pollarded willows by the river, Evereld's hands were full of the early spring flowers, cowslips and primroses and delicate white anemones which they had gathered in the country. She looked up, for a daintily dressed little lady suddenly stood before her, having deserted a camp-stool and easel though she still retained palette and brushes in one hand.

"Miss Ewart!" she exclaimed with a faint touch of American intonation which instantly recalled Evereld to Glion. "I am so delighted to meet you again, and in this spot of all others, this sacred shrine which you lucky English people possess, though we would give millions of dollars if we could but transplant it right over the ocean!"

"How glad I am to see you!" said Evereld warmly. "I shall never forget your kindness last September. May I introduce my husband to you? Mr. Denmead, Miss Upton."

"Ah," said Miss Upton shaking hands with him, "I congratulate Mr. Denmead very warmly. And to think that the third volume which you were to have sent me in America should greet me here by the banks of the Avon! It is delightful!"

"You have not gone back as soon as you expected," said Evereld.

"Well, no. You see the storm at Glion somehow cleared the atmosphere and many things were altered by it sooner or later," said Miss Upton her bright eyes twinkling with fun. "In fact, thanks to you, another romance began there, and next year when Mr. Lewisham has taken his degree at Oxford, why he'll be coming over the ocean to New York, and we have an idea of following the good example which you and Mr. Denmead have set us."

"How glad I am!" said Evereld. "That is charming. Some day we all four ought to meet at Glion, for it is hard that I should have any disagreeable associations left with that lovely little place. You ought to see it Ralph."

"Why not plan a meeting here on one of Shakspere's birthdays? We may possibly be here for some of the performances in the Memorial theatre."

"Yes, that's a better idea still," agreed both Evereld and the American girl.

And after walking back to the town together they parted on the best of terms.

That evening a note and a little packet were brought to Evereld. They were from Miss Upton.

"Just one line in great haste," the letter ran, "we are off to Woodstock to-night, being as they call us true Yankee rushers. You told me you were not going to set up house yet awhile, but wherever you are I know you will drink afternoon tea as you did in Switzerland. Stir your tea with these Stratford Memorial spoons and drink to our next merry meeting in the birthplace of the Swan of Avon. With all good wishes

"Yours cordially,

"MINNIE K. UPTON.

"I hope my romance will have as satisfactory an end to its third volume as yours."

"What a jolly sort of girl she seems," said Ralph as Evereld read him the note, "but that postscript is all wrong, darling. We are not at the end of things, we are only just at the beginning."

CHAPTER XXXII

"Heart, are you great enough
For a love that never tires?
O heart, are you great enough for love?
I have heard of thorns and briers."
TENNYSON.

ON Easter Monday, Ralph and Evereld joined the company at Liverpool. It was not without misgivings that the little bride found herself suddenly launched into a life of which she knew so little, and as they drove through the busy streets from the station she had time to conjure up many fears. They were all however fears lest she should fall short in some way, prove an indifferent housekeeper, be unable to make friends with Ralph's friends, or find herself in other people's way. But all anxiety was lost sight of when they reached the little house in Seymour Street and found Macneillie with his genial voice and fatherly manner waiting to receive them. He was a man who, from his kindly considerateness and from a certain easy friendliness of tone, quickly made new comers feel at home with him.

Perhaps he intuitively guessed that Evereld's position would not be without its difficulties, and he did his very utmost to smoothe the way for her. He at once allowed her to feel that she could be of use.

"I am glad you caught the early train from Stratford," he said as they sat down to a two o'clock dinner. "No, you must take the head of the table for the future. I shall claim the privilege of an old man and sit at the side. As for Ralph he is a very decent carver and we will leave the work to him. The Brintons were in here just before you came, talking over the reception which we give this afternoon."

"A reception?" said Evereld shyly.

"Yes, in the Foyer. You have just come in the nick of time. I was wanting help. Let me see, you were introduced to the Brintons I think at Southbourne."

"Yes, and to Mr. Carrington, and Miss Eva Carton."

"They have both left us. Well, you will soon get to know us all."

Evereld hoped she might do so, but she was utterly bewildered by the end of the reception, where she had been introduced to most of the company and to a number of residents and people of the neighbourhood. As to recognising Ralph's fellow artists when she saw them again in the evening in stage attire, it was impossible. However they good-naturedly told her they were quite used to being cut, and she found Ivy Grant a very pleasant companion and had a good deal of talk with her between whiles.

Ivy had greatly improved since the days of the Scotch tour; trouble had developed her in an extraordinary way; she had grown more gentle and refined, and she still retained her old winsomeness and was a general favourite. Thanks to Ralph's straightforwardness that morning at Forres, she had quickly awakened from her first dream of love, and was none the worse for it. In fact, it had perhaps done her good, she would not lightly lose her heart again, and her standard was certain to remain high. Moreover she knew that Ralph would always be her friend, and she felt curiously drawn to Evereld, who was quite ready to respond to her advances.

There was something very fascinating to Evereld in the novelty and variety of this new life; before many days had passed she began to feel quite as if she belonged to the company. She sympathised keenly with the desire to have good houses, listened with interest to all the discussions and arrangements, and soon found herself on friendly terms with almost every one.

"There is one man, though, that I can't make out at all," she remarked one evening. "He always seems to disappear in such an odd way. I mean Mr. Rawnleigh."

Macneillie and Ralph both laughed.

"You would be very clever indeed if you contrived to know anything about him," said the Manager. "He chooses to keep himself wrapped in a mystery. There's not a creature among us who can tell you anything about him. He's the cleverest low comedian I have ever had; but his habits are peculiar. To my certain knowledge his whole personal wardrobe goes about the world tied up in a spotted handkerchief. He has no make-up box but just carries a stick of red rouge and powdered chalk screwed up in paper like tobacco in his pocket. He puts it on with his finger and rubs it in with a bit of brown paper. Nobody knows in any town where he lodges, but he is always punctual at rehearsal, and if in an emergency he happens to be needed, you can generally find him smoking peacefully in the nearest public-house. He has never been heard to speak an unnecessary word, and in ordinary life looks so like a death's head that he goes by the name of 'Old Mortality.'"

Evereld laughed at this curious description.

"He is the sort of man Charles Lamb might have written an essay about," she said. "Now let me see if I have grasped the rest of them. The retired Naval Captain, Mr. Tempest, is the heavy man, isn't he? Then there are those two young Oxonians—they are Juveniles. And Ralph's friend, Mr. Mowbray, the briefless barrister, what is he?"

"He's the Responsible man," said Macneillie.

"Mr. Brinton, I know, is the old man. And Mr. Thornton, what do you call him?"

"Oh, he is the Utility man. Come you would stand a pretty good examination."

Those spring days were very happy both to Ralph and

Evereld, while Macneillie who had been anxious as to the little bride's comfort and well-being, began to feel entirely at rest on that score.

It cheered him not a little to have her bright face and thoughtful housewifely ways making a home out of each temporary resting place. Her great charm was her ready sympathy and a certain restfulness and quietness of temperament very soothing to highly-strung artistic natures. When the two men returned from the theatre, it was delightful to find her comfortably ensconced with her needlework, ready to take keen interest in hearing about everything, and always giving a pleasant welcome to any visitor they might bring back with them. There was nothing fussy about Evereld: she was the ideal wife for a man of Ralph's eager Keltic temperament.

During July the company dispersed and Ralph and Evereld went to stay with the Magnays in London. It was not until the re-assembling in August that the discomforts of the new life began to become a little more apparent. Perhaps it was the intense heat of the weather, perhaps the contrast between the lodgings in a particularly dirty manufacturing town and the Magnays' ideal home with all its art treasures, and its dainty half foreign arrangement. Certainly Evereld's heart sank a little when she began to unpack.

Their bedroom faced the west and the burning sunshine seemed to steep the little room in drowsy almost tropical heat. She felt sick and miserable. Opening the dressing-table drawer she found that her predecessor had left behind some most uninviting hair-curlers, and some grease-paint. Of course to throw these away and re-line the drawer was easy enough; but by the time she had done it and had arranged all their worldly goods and chattels she felt tired out and was glad to lie down, though she did not dare to scrutinise the blankets and could only try to find consolation in the remembrance that the sheets

at least were quite immaculate, and the pillow her own. She was roused from a doze by Ralph's entrance.

"Come and get a little air, darling," he suggested. "This room is like an oven. Oh! we have got such a fellow in Thornton's place! the most conceited puppy I ever set eyes on. What induced Macneillie to give him a trial I can't think. He is quite a novice and though rolling in gold, he has never thought of offering a premium. I never saw a fellow with so much side on. He ought to be kicked!"

"Who is he?" said Evereld laughing, as she put on her hat and prepared to go out.

"He's the younger son of an earl, I believe, and rejoices in the name of Bertie Vane-Ffoulkes. He patronises the manager as if he were doing him a great favour by joining his company, and he is already plaguing poor Ivy with attentions that she would far rather be without."

They went to the public garden hoping to find a seat in the shade where they could watch the tennis, and here they came across Ivy and Miss Helen Orme, who usually shared lodgings. In attendance on them walked a rather handsome young man with a pink and white complexion and an air of complacent self-esteem. Ivy catching sight of them hastened forward with joyful alacrity though her *cavaliere servente* was in the middle of one of his most telling anecdotes.

"How delightful to meet you again!" she exclaimed taking both Evereld's hands in hers. "I have been longing to see you. Now, if that obnoxious Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes will but take himself off there are so many things I want to say to you."

The Honorable Bertie, however, never thought himself in the way, he begged Ralph to introduce him to Mrs. Denmead and kindly patronised them all for the next hour, chatting in what he flattered himself was a very pleasant and genial manner about himself, the new cos-

tumes he had specially ordered from Abiram's for his first appearance on the stage, the great success of the private theatricals at his father's place in Southshire when he had acted with dear Lady Dunlop Tyars, and various anecdotes of high life which he felt sure would interest "these theatrical people."

At last to their relief he sauntered back to his hotel.

"I wonder whether he really acts well?" said Evereld musingly. "He seems to have a very high opinion of his own powers. I thought all the men's costumes were provided by the management."

"So they are," said Ralph with a smile. "But nothing worn by just a common actor would do for him, I suppose. He must have the very best of everything specially made for him by Abiram, and strike envy into the hearts of all the rest of us."

"We were so comfortable and friendly before he came," said Ivy. "And now I am sure everything will be different. He's an odious, conceited, empty-headed amateur, not in the least fit to be an actor. I wish he would go back to his private theatricals in the country with his Duchesses, and leave us in peace."

"Poor fellow! perhaps he really means to work hard and improve," said Evereld.

"You are always charitable," said Ivy. "As for me I believe we shall never have a moment's peace till Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes has gone."

Her prophesy was curiously fulfilled, for it was wonderful how much trouble and annoyance the wealthy amateur contrived to cause.

Macneillie bore with him with considerable patience, being determined that in spite of his many peccadillos he should have a fair chance. He taught him as much as it is possible to teach a very conceited mortal, gave him many hints by which it is to be feared he profited little, and quietly ignored his rudeness, sometimes enjoying a

good laugh over it afterwards when he described to Evereld what had taken place.

Evereld was one of those people who are always receiving confidences. It was partly her very quietness which made people open their hearts to her. They knew she would never talk and betray them, and there was something in her face which inspired those who knew her to come and pour out all their troubles, certain of meeting sympathy and that sort of womanly wisdom which is better than any amount of mere cleverness.

Even Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes himself was driven at last by the growing consciousness of his unpopularity to tell her of his difficulties.

"I don't know how it is, Mrs. Denmead," he said one day, when they chanced to be alone for a few minutes, "I am not gaining ground here. These stage people are very hard to get on with."

"But they are your fellow artists," said Evereld lifting her clear eyes to his, "why do you call them 'these stage people' as though they were a different sort of race?"

"Well you know," said the Honorable Bertie, "of course you know it's not quite—not exactly—the same thing. Your husband is of a good family, I am quite aware of that, but many of the others, why, you know, they are just nobodies."

Evereld's mouth twitched as she thought how Macneillie would have taken off this characteristic little speech.

"But art knows nothing of rank," she said gently. "Who cares about the parentage of Raphael, or Dante, or David Garrick, or Paganini?"

The earl's son looked somewhat blank.

"That's all very well theoretically," he said. "But in practice it's abominable. I believe there's a conspiracy against me. They are jealous of me and don't mean to let me have a fair chance."

"Oh, Mr. Macneillie is so just and fair to all, that could never be," said Evereld warmly.

"The manager is the worst of them," said the Honorable Bertie, deep gloom settling on his brow. "I hate his way at rehearsal of making a fool of one before all the rest of the company."

"But you can't have a rehearsal all to yourself," said Evereld laughing. "You should hear what they say of other managers at rehearsal, who swear and rave and storm at the actors."

"I shouldn't mind that half as much," said Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes. "It's just that cool persistent patience, and that insufferable air of dignity he puts on that I can't stand. What right has Macneillie to authority and dignity and all that sort of thing? Why I believe he's only the son of a highland crofter."

"I don't think you'll find your ancestors any good in art life," said Evereld. "It is what you can do as an actor that matters, and as long as you feel yourself a different sort of flesh and blood how can you expect them to like you?"

The Honorable Bertie was not used to such straight talking but, to do him justice, he took it in very good part, and always spoke of Mrs. Ralph Denmead with respect, though he still cordially hated her husband. Ralph unfortunately occupied the exact position which he desired, he always coveted the Juvenile Lead, and Macneillie cruelly refused to give him anything but the smallest and most insignificant parts until he improved.

"How can I make anything out of such a character as this?" he grumbled, "Why I have only a dozen sentences in the whole play."

"You can make it precisely what the author intended it to be," said the Manager. "It is the greatest mistake in the world to judge a part by its length. You might make much of that character if only you would take the

trouble. But it's always the way, no heart is put into the work unless the part is a showy one; you go through it each night like a stick."

There was yet another reason why Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes disliked Ralph. In the dulness and disappointment of his theatrical tour he solaced himself by falling in love with Ivy Grant: and Ivy would have nothing to say to him, refused his presents, and took refuge as much as possible with Ralph and Evereld, who quite understanding the state of the case did all they could for her.

The more she avoided him, however, the more irrepressible he became, until at last she quite dreaded meeting him, and had it not been for the friendship of the Denmeads and Helen Orme she would have fared ill.

It was naturally impossible for the Honorable Bertie to confide to Evereld how cordially he detested her husband; he turned instead to Myra Brinton, who being at that time in a somewhat uncomfortable frame of mind was far from proving a wise counsellor. Though in the main a really good woman, Myra had a somewhat curious code of honour, and she was not without a considerable share of that worst of failings, jealousy. If any one had told her in Scotland that she should ever live to become jealous of little Ivy Grant, she would not have believed it possible. But latterly Ivy had several times crossed her path. She was making rapid strides in the profession, and was invariably popular with her audience. This however was less trying to Myra than the perception that a real friendship was springing up between Ivy and young Mrs. Denmead, who, it might have been expected would have more naturally turned to her. She did not realise that to the young bride there seemed a vast chasm of years between them, that a woman of seven and twenty seemed far removed from her ways of looking at everything, and that Evereld dreaded her criticism and turned to Ivy as the more companionable of the two.

Deep down in her heart, moreover, poor Myra could not help contrasting her own lot with that of Ralph Denmead's wife. The little bride was so unfeignedly happy and had such good cause for perfect trust and confidence in her husband that Myra sometimes felt bitterly towards her. Not that Tom Brinton was a bad fellow, there was much about him that was likeable; but the lover of her dreams had ceased to exist, she had settled down into married life that was perhaps as happy as the average but that nevertheless left much to be desired. Her husband would never have dreamt of ill-treating her, indeed in his way he was fond of her still. But it has been well said that unless we are deliberately kind to everyone, we shall often be unconsciously cruel, and it was for lack of this kindly tenderness that Myra's life was becoming more and more difficult. She used to watch Ralph's unfailing care and thoughtful considerateness for Evereld with an envy that ate into her very heart. She was jealous moreover with a jealousy that only a woman can understand of the hope of motherhood which began to dawn for Evereld. It seemed to her that everything a woman covets was given to this young wife, who had known so little of the hardness of life, the fierce struggle for success, which had made her own lot so different. And as time went on a sort of morbid sentimentality crept into her admiration for Ralph, and she found herself beginning to hate the sight of Evereld in a way which would have horrified her had she made time to think out the whole state of things. It was at this time that Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes turned to her for advice. He could not by any possibility have chosen a worse confidante.

"Why is little Miss Grant always running after the Denmeads?" he complained. "I can never get two words with her. If it's not the wife she is with, then it's the husband. I can't think what she sees in that boy, but whenever he's in the theatre she's always talking to him."

"Yes, she is very unguarded," said Myra with a sigh. "Of course he has known her since she was a child, and he was very good in helping her on when we were in Theophilus Skoot's company. But she ought to be more careful, for there is no doubt that she was very much in love with him in the old days. You would be doing a good deed if you separated them a little." She had not in the least intended to say anything of this sort, the words seemed put into her mouth, and somehow when once they were said she vehemently assured herself that she fully believed them. Not only so but she determined to act up to her belief.

"I never saw any one so fascinating," said the Honorable Bertie, who was very badly hit indeed. "She's a regular little witch. I assure you, Mrs. Brinton, I would marry her to-morrow if I were only lucky enough to have the chance. But she hasn't a word to throw at me, and if she is not with the Denmeads, why she will stick like a leech to Miss Orme, and how is a man to make love to a girl when that's the way she treats him? I wonder whether she still cares for that fellow Denmead? If so, couldn't you give his wife a hint, then perhaps she would not have so much to do with her and I might possibly stand a chance of getting a hearing."

"Well," said Myra, rather startled by this suggestion. "I could do that if you like, but of course, it would lead to a quarrel between them."

"Oh, never mind what it leads to," said Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes. "It will at least give me a fair chance with her. Isn't it hard, Mrs. Brinton, that when a fellow doesn't care a straw the girls are all dying for love of him, and when at last he does care why the fates ordain that he shall fall in love with a girl who—well—who doesn't care a straw for him."

Myra could have found it in her heart to laugh at this lame ending, and at the sudden reversal of fortune which

had so greatly depressed the earl's son, but after all there was something genuine about the poor fellow that touched her: for the time Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes really was very much in love with Ivy. It was the sort of passion that might possibly exist for about six months, it might even prove to be a "hardy annual," but it was certainly not a passion of the perennial sort.

She promised that she would do her best for him.

"If he is an empty-headed fellow," she reflected, "he is at least rich and well-connected. It would be a remarkably good marriage for Ivy Grant, and I will do what I can to further it."

CHAPTER XXXIII

"When ye sit by the fire yourselves to warm,
Take care that your tongues do your neighbours no harm."

OLD CHIMNEY-PIECE MOTTO.

CHRISTMAS had passed and they were engaged for a fortnight at Mardentown, one of the large manufacturing places. It was on a frosty clear morning early in the new year that Myra set out from her rather comfortless lodgings to call on Evereld. There was no rehearsal that day and she happened to know that both Macneillie and Ralph were out, so that the coast would be clear for her operations.

"I shall be doing a kindness to her as well as to Ivy and Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes," she reflected. "She is so very innocent, it is high time she understood a little more of the ways of the world."

Evereld was sitting by the fire in a cheerful-looking room into which the wintry sun shone brightly; flowers were on the table, Christmas cards daintily arranged were on the mantelpiece; there was a homelike air about the place which Myra at once noted, and she looked with a pang at the little garment at which the young wife was working when she entered.

"My husband told me Mr. Macneillie was at the theatre so I came in to have a chat with you," she said kissing her affectionately. "You are looking pale this morning, dear, this wandering life is getting too hard for you."

"Oh, I am very well," said Evereld brightly, "and as to the travelling I shall not have much more of that for at

the beginning of February I have promised to go and stay with Mrs. Hereford in London. They all say it is right, so I mustn't grumble, but I do so hate leaving Ralph."

"He can come to you for the Sundays," said Myra. "Where has he gone to this morning?"

"He and Mr. Mowbray have hired bicycles and have gone over to Brookfield Castle. They will have a beautiful ride for it is so still and the roads will be nice and dry. Ivy wanted to go too, but she couldn't manage to get a bicycle, they were all engaged."

"Well it sounds unkind," said Myra. "But I am not sorry that she was forced to stay behind. Ivy is getting too careless of appearances."

"Do you really disapprove of bicycling for women?" asked Evereld. "One has hardly had time to get used to it, but it seems such capital exercise, and no one could look more graceful in cycling than Ivy does."

"Oh, I don't mean that, dear," said Myra colouring a little. "I really hardly know how to explain things to you, for you seem so young and confiding, and so ready to trust everyone. But you see Ivy rather runs after your husband. Of course she always was a born flirt, I don't think she can help it. But people are beginning to notice it and to talk, they are indeed."

"I wonder any one can be so foolish as to think such things," said Evereld with a little air of matronly dignity which became her very well. "Every one belonging to the company must surely understand that Ivy is so much with us because she is being actually persecuted by that provoking Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes."

"Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes is not so bad as people make out, he may be vain and conceited I quite admit, but he really is in love with Ivy and she is very foolish to run away from him on every possible occasion. It would be a capital marriage for her. Why, if the present heir were to die, Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes comes into the title, Ivy forgets that."

"She positively dislikes him," said Evereld. "You surely wouldn't wish her to marry such a man as that just for his position?"

"No, but I think she might be a little more civil to him and at least give him a hearing. And quite apart from that I really think, dear, you are ill-advised in having her so much here."

Evereld's clear blue eyes looked questioningly and in a puzzled fashion at her visitor.

"But we like her and she likes us. Why shouldn't she come?"

"Because it would be much wiser for her not to come," said Myra. "I know her past, and you do not. If you are wise you will not have Ivy for your intimate friend."

A troubled look began to steal over Evereld's face, she was not well, and was very ill-fitted just then to take a calm dispassionate view of anything. Myra's words and hints agitated her all the more because she only half understood them. Vaguely she felt that a shadow was creeping over her cloudless sky. She shivered a little and drew closer to the fire.

"Please tell me just what you mean," she said rather piteously. "I know of nothing against Ivy, and she has been Ralph's friend for a long time, so naturally I like her."

"Naturally!" exclaimed Myra, whose jealous nature found it hard to credit such a statement. "That only shows how innocent you are, how little you understand the world. Why to my certain knowledge that girl is in love with your husband."

Evereld's eyes dilated, she stared at the speaker for a moment in mute consternation. Then suddenly she began to laugh but not quite naturally, her tears were at no great distance.

"How ridiculous!" she said. "I wonder you can say such a thing to me. Ivy! who has been quite foolishly fond of me! Oh, indeed you are mistaken!"

"The mistake is yours!" said Myra, "Ivy is a very coaxing little thing and would of course find it most convenient to have your friendship. She is clever and managing, and always contrives to get her own way, and then of course she is a born actress. I have no doubt she was delighted to vow an eternal friendship with you. It's just what would suit her best."

Evereld's heart sank, she seemed to be suddenly plunged into an entirely new region, where doubt and suspicion and jealousy and evil intention made the whole atmosphere dark and oppressive. Not since her difficulties at Glion had she felt so miserable and so utterly perplexed.

"You see, dear," said Myra, "I knew them both in the days of the Scotch tour, and from the first understood how things were. I daresay your husband hasn't told you about it, men forget these things, but there is no doubt whatever that Ivy was in love with him. I saw it then clearly enough, and I see it now. Be persuaded by me, and for your own sake and for her good don't have her much with you. I am older than you, and I know the harm that a fascinating little witch like Ivy can work. Of course I say all this to you in confidence, but I thought it was only kind to give you a hint. You have not been to the theatre just lately."

"No, I am rather tired of this play," said Evereld. "I am glad we are to have a Shaksperian week at Bath."

"Yes, 'legitimate' is rather refreshing, isn't it?" said Myra. "But the dresses are a bother. I have to devise something new for Portia in the casket scene, for the old one was ruined the last time I wore it. There were six of us dressing in one room, and there was hardly space to turn round; the train is all over grease-paint. The men are lucky in having their costumes provided by the management. Well, good bye, dear, take care of yourself. And be sure to let me know if there is anything I can do for you."

Evereld thanked her rather faintly and was not sorry to find herself alone once more. She felt giddy as she tried to recall exactly what Myra had said and hinted. Could it possibly be true? And if so what was she to do? That there was a vein of silliness in Ivy she had long ago discovered; now and then she said things which jarred a little on her, but the more she had seen of her the more she had learnt to like her, and her perfectly open and rational friendship for Ralph had always seemed to her most natural. Was it true that all the time Ivy had been acting? Myra's arguments returned to her with a force which she vainly tried to struggle against. Had she been able to go out in the sunshine for a brisk walk probably she would have taken a more quiet view of the state of affairs, but she was not well enough for that, and the more she brooded over it all the more miserable she became.

Just when her visions were at the darkest the bell rang and the little servant ushered in Ivy herself.

"What luck to find you alone," said the girl brightly, "I was afraid Mr. Macneillie would perhaps be in. I'm in the worst of tempers, for on this perfect day there wasn't a lady's bicycle to be had, and there are those two lucky men enjoying themselves while I am left in this smoky town."

"I was sorry to hear you had been disappointed," said Evereld, going on with her work. But somehow as she said the words she knew that she was not so sorry as she had at first been. Things had changed since Myra's visit. She even fancied a difference in Ivy. Was there something more than cleverness in that winsome face? Was there a certain craftiness in those ever-changing eyes? She began to think there was, and being a bad hand at concealing her thoughts, her manner became constrained and she was extremely unresponsive to the flood of bright talk which Ivy poured out.

"Something is worrying you," said the girl at last

growing conscious of the curious difference in her friend's manner. "'Don't worry! Try Sunlight!' as the soap advertisement tells you. Come out with me for a turn before dinner. Walking is the sovereign remedy for all ills. We used to try it in Scotland when we were half starving."

Evereld hated herself for it, but she was so overwrought and miserable that even the use of that word "we" grated upon her. She declined the invitation, and her manner grew more and more cold and repellent.

Ivy was puzzled and hurt.

"Have you been alone all the morning?" she said, wondering if perhaps that accounted for her friend's manner.

"No, I have had a call from Mrs. Brinton," said Evereld colouring a little.

"Of all perplexing people she is the most perplexing," said Ivy. "One day I like her, the next she is perfectly detestable. What did she talk about?"

Evereld faltered a little.

"Oh, of various things," she said blushing. "She is getting ready a new dress for the Casket scene."

"By the bye," said Ivy springing up, "that reminds me that I must ask her for the pattern of a sleeve I want for Jessica. I know she has it."

And with friendly farewells which Evereld could not find it in her heart to respond to at all cordially she took her departure.

No sooner was she out of the house than Evereld's conscience began to prick her. She had felt very unkindly towards Ivy, and the wistful look of surprise and bewilderment which she had seen on the girl's face as she uttered her cold farewells kept returning to her. What if Ivy went now to see Myra and learnt that they had been talking her over? What if after all this story of Myra's was quite mistaken, or possibly one of those half truths

that are almost worse and more damaging than utter falsehoods?

Shame and regret and self-reproach began to struggle with the wretched suspicions that had been sown in her heart by Myra's words, and her long repressed tears broke forth at last,—she sobbed as if her heart would break.

"How miserably I have failed," she thought to herself. "How ready I was to think evil, and to jump to the very worst conclusions. It would be likely enough that she should have cared for Ralph who was so kind to her when she was a child—I should only love her all the more if she had loved him. Why must I fancy at the first hint that there is sin in her friendship for him now? I won't believe it—I won't—I won't."

She took up her work again and tried to sew, but her tears blinded her, for she remembered how much harm might already have been done by her angry resentment and her ready suspicions. Ever since the hope of motherhood had come to her she had tried her very utmost to rule her thoughts, to dwell only on what was beautiful and of good report, to read only what was healthy and ennobling, to see beautiful scenery whenever there was an opportunity, and in every way to try harder than usual to live up to her ideal; she knew that in this way the character of the next generation might be sensibly affected.

Well, she had failed just when failure was most bitter to her, and being now thoroughly upset she had to struggle with all sorts of nervous terrors and anxieties and forebodings, in which her only resource was to repeat to herself the words of the Ewart motto "Avaunt Fear!" which had stood her in good stead during her flight from Sir Matthew.

It was the sound of the servant's step on the stairs and the ominous rattle of the dinner things which finally

checked her tears; she was not going to be caught crying, and hastily beat a retreat into her bedroom.

"If they see me like this they will imagine Ralph is unkind to me!" she thought, shocked at her own reflection in the looking-glass. "Oh dear, how I wish he were at home! And yet I don't, for if he were here just now I know I couldn't resist telling him everything, and that would worry him; and he shall not be worried just now when he is so specially busy studying 'Hamlet.'"

Macneillie returning from the theatre soon after, could not but observe at their *tête à tête* dinner that his companion had been crying, but like the sensible man he was he affected utter blindness and did the lion's share of the talking.

"Can you spare me a little time this afternoon," he said as he rose from the table. "I want to drive over to a village about three miles from here, the day is so bright I don't think you would take cold."

Evereld gladly assented, and Macneillie, who as an old traveller was an adept at making people comfortable with rugs and cushions, tucked her comfortably into the best open carriage he had been able to secure and was glad to see that the fresh air soon brought back the colour to her face and the light to her eyes.

"You and I have both had a dull morning. I have been bored to death with people incessantly wanting to speak to me, and you I suppose have been bored by being too much alone."

"No," she said, "I have not been much alone; Mrs. Brinton came to me first, and after she had gone Ivy came. They both of them vexed me somehow, but I think it was my own fault."

Macneillie meditated for a few minutes. He had not studied character all these years for nothing, and Evereld's transparent honesty and straightforwardness made her easy reading. Myra he had known for a long time

both before her engagement and since her marriage; she was a much more complex character, but he understood her thoroughly and had noted, though she little guessed it, that she was jealous both of Evereld's happiness and of Ivy's success in her profession: moreover he was not without a shrewd suspicion that she was just a little bit in love with Ralph herself.

"Life is never altogether easy when a great number of people are going about the world together," he said. "There are sure to be little rubs. If you have ever seen anything of military life you will understand that. The officers' wives and families are pretty sure to have their quarrels and little differences now and then, but in the main there is a certain loyalty that binds them together. It is just the same with us. I have known people not on speaking terms for weeks, but they generally have a good-natured reconciliation before the end of the tour."

"Yes," said Evereld, "I can quite fancy that. And I know if I hadn't been horrid and suspicious things would have been different this morning. Please don't say anything about it to Ralph, I don't want him to know that I had been crying."

Macneillie could not resist teasing her a little.

"What! I thought you were a model husband and wife, and had no secrets from each other! And here you are pledging me to silence!"

She laughed at his comical expression, and felt much better for laughing.

"We do tell each other everything as a rule, but this could only vex him and make things uncomfortable all round, and just now he is studying so very hard for his first attempt at Hamlet. I really believe he is more Hamlet than himself; he seems to think of him all day long and even in his sleep he has taken to muttering bits of his part. It's quite uncanny to hear him in the dead of night!"

She was quite her cheerful self again and nothing more was said as to what had passed that morning. Macneillie however turned things over in his mind and that evening at the theatre he reaped the harvest of a quiet eye, and began to understand the precise state of affairs.

CHAPTER XXXIV

"O for a heart from self set free
And doubt and fret and care,
Light as a bird, instinct with glee,
That fans the breezy air.

"O for a mind whose virtue moulds
All sensuous fair display,
And, like a strong commander, holds
A world of thoughts in sway!"

PROFESSOR BLACKIE.

"WHAT has happened to Evereld?" said Ivy that morning, as Myra graciously cut out for her a second pattern of the sleeve which she wanted. "I have been to see her and it was like hurling words at a stone wall. I couldn't have imagined that she would ever be like that."

"Oh, you have just been in there," said Myra reflectively. "I am sorry you went to-day."

"What has come over her?" said Ivy. "She seemed almost to dislike me."

"I think she was a little upset by something she had heard," said Myra, handing the pattern to her visitor.

"What can she have heard that should make her different to me?" said Ivy hotly.

"Well, my dear," said Myra with a swift glance at her, "you know people are beginning to say that you run after Mr. Denmead, and I daresay she knows that you cared for him when we were in Scotland. Though very innocent she can hardly help putting two and two together, and it is but natural that she should resent your making friends with her for the sake of being able to go about constantly with her husband. You made a mistake in professing such a very violent friendship for her."

"It is all a horrible lie," cried Ivy, crimson with anger and distress. "No wonder she hates me if she believes me to be such a hypocrite as that! I was her friend—but

I never will be again, no, nor Ralph's either. Oh! they will discuss it all and talk me over! and I believe it's your doing. You told her this lie. How I hate you! how I hate you!"

Like a little fury she flung into the fire the pattern which Myra had just cut out for her, and was gone before her companion could get in a single word.

Down the street she sped, looking prettier than ever because her eyes were still bright with indignation and her cheeks aglow at the recollection of what had passed. As ill luck would have it, just as she reached the quiet road in which she was lodging with Helen Orme, she came suddenly face to face with Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes.

"I had been to inquire if you were in, and to try and persuade you to come and skate this afternoon," he said eagerly. "The ice in the park will bear they say. Do come."

"But I never skated in my life," said Ivy.

"I will teach you, I am sure you would learn in a very little while, and it is just the sort of thing you would do to perfection."

As he spoke a sudden thought darted into Ivy's mind. Here was a man who for some time had seriously annoyed her by persistent attentions which she did not want. She would now change her tactics, would carry on a desperate flirtation with him, and show these detestable gossips that they were quite in the wrong. As for the Denmeads she would avoid them as much as possible, and to Myra she would not vouchsafe a single word, no—not though they shared dressing-rooms!

All this passed through her mind while Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes was assuring her that she would skate like one to the manner born.

"I don't think I can go," she said hesitatingly. "For one thing I have no skates, and then——"

"I will manage the skates if only you will just come and try," he said persuasively, and after a little more dis-

cussion Ivy consented, and the Honorable Bertie in the seventh heaven of happiness hurried away into the High Street, there to procure the most dainty little pair of skates that the place could supply, while Ivy, forgetting her anger in the satisfaction of her new scheme, ran in to make a hasty meal, and to put on the prettiest walking-dress and hat she possessed.

Late in the afternoon, Ralph and George Mowbray bicycling back from Brookfield Castle dismounted for a few minutes to watch the skaters in the park, and to speculate as to the chances of the ice for the next day.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Ralph, suddenly perceiving a graceful little figure skimming past under the guidance of a tall fair-haired man, "Why there's Ivy Grant pioneered by the Honorable Bertie! Wonders will never cease."

"So she has caved in at last," said George Mowbray with a laugh, "having snubbed him all these months I thought she would have contrived to send him about his business. How cock-a-hoop he does look!"

It was quite patent to every one after this that Ivy's objections to Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes were a thing of the past. She accepted every votive offering he brought her, skated with him at every available opportunity, and listened in the most flattering way to his extremely vapid talk. For each inch she granted him he was ready enough to seize an ell, and Macneillie who had no confidence at all in the character of his wealthy amateur, soon saw that things must be promptly checked.

"My dear," he said one day to Evereld when their stay at Marden-town was drawing to a close. "I wish you would somehow contrive to give Ivy Grant a hint; she is going on very foolishly with Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes, and it is quite impossible that she can really have any regard for him."

"I can't manage to get hold of her," said Evereld sigh-

ing. "She won't come here and see me, but always makes some excuse."

"Well, I shall get rid of Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes then," said Macneillie. "He has been an insufferable nuisance ever since he came. Would you believe it—he actually had the presumption to grumble because Ralph was to play Hamlet! I believe he seriously thinks he would do it much better himself! The conceit of that fellow beats everything I ever knew. You should have seen his face when he found that he was cast for Rosencrantz! It was a picture!"

"I never can understand why you yourself don't play Hamlet," said Evereld. "You would do it splendidly."

"Ralph understands," said Macneillie a shade crossing his face. "He will tell you why it is."

There was silence for some minutes. Then, as though shaking himself free from thoughts he did not wish to dwell upon, Macneillie began to pace the room and to consider how best to rid the company of the undesirable presence of the Honorable Bertie.

"I have it!" he exclaimed,—suddenly bursting into a fit of laughter. "Great Scott! That will be the very thing!" he rubbed his hands with keen satisfaction, chuckling to himself in high glee over the thought of the fun he anticipated. "Come to the theatre to-night, my dear, and I will treat you to a new transformation scene which, if I'm not mistaken, will bring down the house. But mind, not a word of it to any one beforehand."

It was not only his fellow actors who objected to the Honorable Bertie, he was detested by the stage carpenters and scene shifters, not so much because of his conceit as because he had an objectionable habit of being always in the way. For the past week they had been giving a play in which he took the part of a dragoon guard and though the insignificance of the character chafed him sorely, he found some consolation in the knowledge that in uniform he presented a really splendid appearance.

Now it chanced that there was a property chair used in this play of remarkably comfortable proportions, and the Honorable Bertie being long and lazy invariably lounged at his ease in this chair between the acts, for he had no change of dress and no opportunity of amusing himself with Ivy just in the intervals because she happened to have rather elaborate changes.

Macneillie, who was his own Stage Manager, had for some time observed the cool disregard shown by the amateur of the peremptory call of "Clear!" on the part of his Assistant stage manager. Deaf to the order Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes invariably took his ease in the big chair, lazily watching the busy workers with an air of irritating superiority.

"I think I shall cure him of this little habit," reflected Macneillie with a smile, and seizing a moment when his victim was the only person visible on the stage he suddenly rang up the curtain.

A roar of laughter rose from the audience, for there in full view sat the Honorable Bertie with his legs dangling in unconventional comfort over the arm of the chair.

He sprang to his feet in horror, dashed to the practicable door at the back of the stage deeming it his nearest escape, forgot that he still wore his guard's helmet, crashed it violently against the lintel, and by the time he had staggered back, and with lowered crest disappeared behind the scenes, left the house in convulsions of merriment.

The curtain descended again, and the Honorable Bertie choking with rage contemplated his battered helmet with a fiery face, and vowed vengeance on Macneillie, but had not the sense to join in the laughter which even Ivy could not suppress, do what she would. The sight of her mirth put the last touch to his wrath, and at the close of the performance he had an angry interview with the manager who, as he furiously declared, had made him ridiculous before the whole house.

"The curtain was rung up too early," admitted Macneillie. "But the order had been given to clear the stage; you persistently disregard that order every night and must take the consequences."

"I will not stay another day in your d—d company," said the Honorable Bertie, fuming.

Macneillie bowed in acquiescence; gravely assured the Earl's son that a cheque for the amount of his weekly salary should be sent the next day to his hotel, and bade him good evening. Perhaps Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes did not quite like to be so promptly taken at his own word, perhaps the quiet dignity of Macneillie's manner was too much for him; the threats and denunciations he longed to pour forth somehow stuck in his throat, and with a muttered oath he took his departure, leaving Macneillie well satisfied with the result of his stratagem.

Three days after, the company moved on to Gloucester, Ivy however had made the Business Manager put her in a different railway carriage from the Denmeads with whom she usually travelled, and Evereld could only contrive to exchange a few words with her at the station.

The following week when they went to Bath matters seemed rather more favourable. Ralph who had a great liking for the old theatre there with its many memories, declared that it was the most interesting theatre in England, and Evereld, partly for the sake of seeing it, partly with the hope of patching up the quarrel, went with him on the Monday morning to rehearsal.

The play was "The Merchant of Venice" and fortune favoured her, for Ivy had not a great deal to do, and quickly yielded to the gentle kindly manner of Ralph's wife. Together they laughed over Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes' discomfiture, and agreed that it was a great relief to be well quit of him; then, as the rehearsal bid fair to be a lengthy one, Ivy ran out to buy Bath buns at Fort's and handed them impartially to all present including Myra,

and Evereld began to think that things would soon come straight once more.

"Do come in to tea with me to-day," she begged. "I shall be alone for hours for they mean to go through some of Hamlet this afternoon for Ralph's sake, and I shall be going to London next week you know for some time."

It was difficult to resist the friendly look in her eyes, and Ivy consented to come, arriving soon after four at the rooms in Kingsmead Terrace in a somewhat silent mood. However tea and a good laugh over the vagaries of Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes soon thawed her.

"I only wish I had never flirted with him," she said regretfully. "All the time I hated and despised him."

"What made you do it then?" said Evereld.

Ivy crimsoned.

"It was Myra's fault. I believe she was in league with him. When I found that she had told you such a lie about me, I thought I would show everyone how false it was."

"But I knew it to be false almost directly," said Evereld. "It was only for an hour or so, before there had been time to think things over that I believed it, dear. Indeed if I had been well and strong I don't think I should have believed it for a moment."

To her surprise Ivy suddenly broke down and began to sob.

"Oh," she said, "I am so dreadfully alone in the world! I don't think I can do without you two."

"Why should you do without us?" said Evereld. "I hope you are not going to punish me any more for having been cold and repellent the other day? Ralph and I shall always want you to be our friend."

"But how can I be your friend when all these days you have been discussing me?"

"We haven't discussed you. Ralph has never heard one word of what Myra said. The only thing he did say

was that he thought you did not realise the sort of man Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes really was, or you would be more careful. Of course he can't help knowing, too, that you have quarrelled with Myra, because you don't speak to her."

"I am going to tell you just the whole truth," said Ivy, drying her eyes and looking straight up at Evereld with an air of resolute courage that made her winsome little face actually beautiful. "I did love Ralph once. At first he was just a sort of hero to me, but in Scotland when we were all so miserable and he was always trying to help me, then I began to love him; and when the Skoots disappeared and left us stranded at Forres I couldn't bear to be parted from him and let him see that I cared. I knew he understood; for he showed me that it would not do for us to stay together when the company dispersed, and he told me how he cared for you, not of course saying your name, but I knew he meant you. At first it made me angry and miserable, but I liked him so for being true, and for speaking straightforwardly as very few men do to women; and always he made me feel that he respected me and liked and trusted me. When later on the Brintons told me he was engaged to you I was able to be glad of it —I was indeed; and when Myra told me the other day that you believed such a lie about me, and I guessed at once it was all her doing—why it seemed as if she had trodden under foot the very best part of me, and afterwards I didn't much care what I did. I think I could almost have married Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes."

"That would have been an awful fate," said Evereld with a shudder, as she realised how much harm her ready suspicions had done. "Ivy dear, you must promise me never to let anyone come between us again. Ralph and I are always your friends—do believe that once for all, or I shall never feel at rest about you."

They kissed each other warmly and the misunderstanding was quite at an end, leaving them much closer friends

than they had been before. To set things straight with Myra Brinton would probably not prove so easy, but Evereld was very anxious to effect a reconciliation before she went to London.

Partly with a view to this, and partly because she had not yet seen the "Merchant of Venice" she got Ralph to take her that night behind the scenes.

Unlike so many of the modern theatres the old theatre at Bath in which Mrs. Siddons had often acted in former days could boast a comfortable green room, and here, she and Ralph and Helen Orme did their best to draw Ivy and Myra Brinton into more pleasant relations.

Ivy might have been persuaded to relent, but Myra withdrew into a shell of cold reserve which made Ralph think of the days when he had first known her at Dumfries. She looked on with chilling surprise and disapproval while Evereld chatted in a friendly fashion with Ivy, and quite refused to join in the general conversation. While all the rest were pinning each other's draperies she stood by the fireplace busily occupied with her powder-puff, apparently quite self-engrossed, but in reality noting with jealous pangs the easy good fellowship of her fellow artists and the expression of Ralph's face as he talked with Evereld and Ivy. She made up her mind to hold entirely aloof and show how she despised them all, and it proved quite impossible to make any way with her.

Evereld made one last effort in the interval after the third act when Myra, looking extremely handsome in her lawyer's cap and gown came into the green room ready for the Trial scene, and Ivy, in good spirits after receiving much applause for her sprightly rendering of Jessica's part, was quite disposed to break the silence which had now lasted so long between them. But as it takes two to make a quarrel it also takes two to make an atonement, and Mrs. Brinton calmly turned her back upon the girl and sailed across the room to the inevitable powder-box.

"I don't care," said Ivy under her breath as she shrugged her shoulders and left the room. "If it pleases her to go about with a black dog on her back, let her! Now you are going to stand at the wings, Evereld, and enjoy the Trial scene; you will have a capital view of it just from here. As for me, I shall run up and change for my moonlight scene. *Au revoir!*"

She felt in a mischievous mood, resenting Myra's absurd behaviour, and yet too much pleased by her good reception and by the satisfaction of being on comfortable terms with Ralph and Evereld again to be exactly angry.

"I will dress quickly and run down before Myra comes up for her next change," she reflected. "It is just hateful sharing a dressing-room with anyone when you are not on speaking terms. I wish Mr. Macneillie would have let her have the 'Star' room, but he always will keep the one nearest the stage for himself whether it is good or bad. Bother! there's not room to swing a cat in this place! I wish they would give us more decent rooms."

Jessica's dress required a great deal of pinning and draping. It was by no means easy to dispose of the long trailing fold of light Liberty silk, and Ivy was in an impatient mood. Suddenly as she tossed the end of a bit of light gauze drapery over her shoulder it caught by some mischance in the gas jet from which she had, against rules, removed the guard while curling her fringe. In an instant it was flaring all about her, and wild with fright she found it impossible to free herself from its serpent like coils.

Presence of mind had never been one of her characteristics and now the awful sense of her danger and her horrible loneliness drove her to distraction. She cried for help, but it seemed to her that she might burn to death before anyone heard her in that remote place.

Meanwhile Evereld standing at the wings was watching with keen interest Macneillie's masterly representation of

Shylock, and thinking how handsome Ralph looked as Bassanio, when she was startled by a distant cry.

"You take my house when you do take the prop that doth sustain my house," pleaded Shylock, and at that instant another much more distinct sound—unquestionably a scream—from behind, made Evereld's heart stand still. Surely it was Ivy's voice!

Without a moment's hesitation she opened the door leading to the ladies' dressing rooms, hurried up the stairs and had just gained the passage above, when to her horror she saw Ivy rushing forward her pale green dress all ablaze.

Snatching off the warm cloak she had been wearing as she stood at the wings Evereld flung it about the terrified girl, and exerting all her strength almost hurled Ivy to the ground, dismayed to see how the flames were rising towards her face.

"Don't try to get up," she cried, as Ivy mad with fear and pain would have leapt to her feet again. "Roll over and we shall crush out the fire."

It could have been only two minutes yet it seemed to them hours before others hearing the screams came to the rescue, and by that time Evereld had succeeded in stifling the flames. Macneillie learning directly he came off the stage that something was amiss hurried up to them and was dismayed to find what had happened.

"Go at once and get hold of Dr. Grey," he said turning to the business manager who had been the first to come up. "He is in the front row of the dress circle. Brinton," he added turning to the Duke of Venice, who was the next to appear, "you will help me to lift her into her dressing-room."

"It is so small and crowded," said Evereld. "Would not the green room be better? she must be carried down the stairs sooner or later."

"Yes, quite true. Give me your cloak, Brinton, we

will throw it over her, and do you go first, Evereld, and see that no one is in the way. We shall get her safely to the green room before the end of the act."

Ivy's moans as they carried her were drowned in the applause which followed the end of the Trial Scene. And Evereld, not pausing to realise that she was trembling from head to foot, went on before to make ready a place where they could lay her down, and thanks to the promptitude of the business manager the doctor was on the spot almost as soon as they were.

Ralph, strolling up the stage a few minutes later, having heard nothing that had passed, was rudely recalled to the present as he approached the little group of people round the green room door. "The doctor has just gone in," he heard some one say, and the words threw him into a sudden panic of terror.

"Let me get by," he said. "What's the matter?"

"You can't go in," said several voices! "Ivy Grant has been awfully burnt, they say Mrs. Denmead managed to get the fire out."

"Where is my wife?" said Ralph distractedly.

"She is in the green room helping. It's no good my dear boy. I tell you no one can go in."

Ralph, sick with anxiety for Evereld, and only longing to get her out of the room, seemed on the point of taking the speaker by the collar and thrusting him aside, when to his relief the door opened and Macneillie came out. They all made way for him and heard him giving orders for a messenger to be sent at once for the ambulance, then before a single question could be put to him by Ralph, the Assistant stage manager came up to discuss the arrangements that were to be made for the last act. Fortunately Ivy's understudy happened to be present so that no very great delay was to be feared, and when this matter had been disposed of, Helen Orme who had good naturedly hurried away to dress in order that she might

be free to offer her help, came hastening back and begged leave to go in and do what she could for Ivy.

"Send Evereld to me," was Ralph's parting injunction, and Helen Orme, feeling very sorry for him, went in and finding that the preliminary dressing of Ivy's burns was over, admitted him on her own authority.

It was a kindly meant act but under the circumstances a little risky, for at the first sight of him Evereld's composure began to give way. The doctor noticed it at once.

"Now, Mrs. Denmead," he said cheerfully. "Let this lady take your place for a minute, and you go and sit down. I shall be ready to dress that hand of yours directly."

"Oh!" moaned Ivy who had spoken very little since they had carried her down. "Is Evereld hurt?"

"Just a little," said the doctor. "But she won't grudge that, for she has saved your life."

"Do you think you could just manage to get me home," whispered Evereld, suddenly realising that her strength would hold out no longer and that she could only agitate and harm Ivy by staying.

"Yes, darling," said Ralph, "of course I can."

But the cheery doctor had overheard and was beside them in a minute.

"Where are you staying?" he said crossing the room to them. "In Kingsmead Terrace? I will drive you there at once in my carriage. Wait for a minute and I will bring it round to the stage door. My little patient here will do well enough now, and before long they will carry her to the hospital in the ambulance. Just one word with you, Mr. Denmead."

Ralph followed him out of the room.

"Now kindly pilot me through these passages," said the doctor, having put a brief question or two as to Evereld. "Your part is not quite finished is it? Another scene yet if I remember right. You must leave me to see

your wife safely home, and don't be over anxious. Of course, it's an unfortunate thing that she has had this fearful shock, but there is no reason why she should not get on well enough. Have you a decent sort of landlady with a head on her shoulders?"

"She is a capable sort of woman," said Ralph, "but——"

"All right. That will do very well for the present. Here's my carriage——"

He gave directions to the coachman, and in a few minutes time Ralph had put his wife into the brougham and with a heavy heart had turned back into the theatre to get through the rest of his work as best he could.

CHAPTER XXXV

"God! do not let my loved one die,
But rather wait until the time
That I am grown in purity
Enough to enter thy pure clime."

LOWELL.

WHEN Ivy from time to time opened her eyes in that dreadful interval of waiting for the ambulance which seemed to her almost age-long, she saw a curious succession of faces. First there had been the cheerful doctor, and Evereld with her brave blue eyes and firm little mouth. Then those two faces had mysteriously disappeared, and the wrinkled and careworn features of the wardrobe woman had greeted her instead, and Helen Orme dressed as Nerissa bent over her and asked her if she suffered much.

After that Myra Brinton had stooped and kissed her, to her great astonishment, and all the foolish little quarrels of the past died out under the influence of that great uniter of human beings—pain. Ralph came too with kindly inquiries, and she roused herself to ask again after Evereld.

"You are sure the doctor told the truth?" she asked doubtfully. "Was she really not badly burnt?"

"No, not badly," said Ralph. "Only one hand blistered and her wrist scorched."

The summons came just at that minute for Myra and Helen Orme, and he seized the opportunity to escape, fearful lest she should ask further questions. He stood at the wings with his friend George Mowbray who was playing Antonio, watching in a dreamy way the ill-arranged dress which had been hastily contrived for Ivy's understudy.

He would have missed the cue for his entrance had not George Mowbray pushed him forward, and it seemed to him that it was not his own voice but the voice of somebody else that uttered Bassanio's speeches, while all the time he himself was away with Evereld, though his body mechanically went through the business of his part. Macneillie watched him with some anxiety, but before the play ended, the arrival of the ambulance and the necessity of seeing Ivy safely transferred to it drove all else from the manager's mind. He refused to allow anyone but himself to take her to the hospital, feeling that she was under his charge, and troubled to remember that the poor child had not a relation in the world who could now befriend her.

"Do your best to get well quickly, my dear," he said in his kindly voice when he took leave of her. "And don't fret as to the future. You shall come back to the company whenever you like."

Returning to the theatre he found the scene struck and all the house in darkness save for the light by the stage door.

"Is Mr. Denmead still in his dressing-room?" he inquired.

"No sir," said the door-keeper. "He has been gone some time and Mr. and Mrs. Brinton with him."

Macneillie ran upstairs to speak a word to Ivy's understudy as to the dresses needed later in the week, then he walked slowly back to Kingsmead Terrace, but although he rang repeatedly no one came to answer the door.

He was just meditating a burglarious entrance by the kitchen window when at last he heard footsteps approaching and the latch was raised.

Myra Brinton softly opened to him; her face was pale and anxious.

"Oh, is it you!" she exclaimed. "I hoped it was the nurse. Tom has gone to try and get hold of one. Evereld's child is born and the doctor seems terribly anxious about her."

Macneillie was a true Scotsman and seldom said much when he was moved. He stalked on into the sitting room and began to pace to and fro in silence.

Evereld had grown almost like a daughter to him and the thought of her peril and of Ralph's frightful anxiety brought a choking sensation to his throat.

"What of the child?" he asked presently.

"It is a boy," said Myra. "Of course extremely small; they gave him to me in the next room and I have done what I could for him, the maidservant is seeing to him now, and the others are in with Evereld. Hark! there is someone coming downstairs."

Macneillie went out into the passage and encountered Ralph who looked as if years had passed over his head since they last met.

"They want another doctor," he said snatching his hat from the stand.

"Give me the name and address and I will go," said Macneillie.

"You have not had your supper," objected Ralph. "And, as it is, we are turning the whole house upside down for you."

"What matter!" said Macneillie. "Go back to Evereld, my boy, I will see to this for you."

Ralph protested no further, indeed his one desire was to return to his wife, but catching sight of Myra, he paused to inquire after the child.

"Evereld keeps asking if it is all right," he said. "And the doctor, who would say anything to quiet her, assures her it is all it ought to be. Do you think there is really a hope that it will live?"

"I know so little about such things," said Myra, with a sick remembrance of the jealous feelings that had stirred within her on first learning of Evereld's hopes. "He is the tiniest little fellow I ever saw, but there seems nothing amiss with him. Hark! there is a ring at the door bell.

It must be the nurse at last. We will see what she says to him."

Ralph, who had vaguely expected a sort of Mrs. Gamp, was relieved to see a comely middle-aged woman with a refined and sensible face, and that wonderful air of composure and capable quietness which makes a trained nurse so unlike an amateur.

She praised all that Myra had done and declared that with care the child would do well enough, and Ralph, looking for the first time at the little doll-like face of his son felt a sudden sense of hope and joy and relief which carried him through the dark hours of that night of anxiety and suspense.

For all night long Evereld lay between life and death. The younger doctor who had been called in despaired of saving her, and Ralph knew it, though no one actually put the thought into words. He knew it by the man's face, and by the sound of effort in the voice of his first friend, cheery Doctor Grey. Evereld was dying from exhaustion, and from the terrible shock she had undergone.

Still like a true Denmead he clung to hope, and held his fear at arm's length; every word of encouragement that fell from Dr. Grey's lips helping him to keep up.

Her age was in her favour, her patience, her great firmness and courage all would stand her in good stead; so said the old doctor; and Ralph hoped against hope until at last about sunrise a change set in. Even the younger doctor grew sanguine. Evereld's hold upon life was evidently growing firmer. She looked up at Ralph and smiled.

"What day is it?" she asked, for pain knows no time limits and she had no notion whether hours or days had gone by.

"It is Tuesday morning," he said stooping down to kiss her, a rapturous sense of relief filling his heart.

She seemed to meditate for a few minutes, and obediently took the gruel the nurse brought her.

"Why!" she exclaimed presently. "It is your first night in Hamlet, and you will be tired out. Go and rest, darling."

"The best rest is to see you growing better," he said tenderly.

After another interval she asked about the child.

"Do you want to see him?" asked the young doctor, hailing as a good sign her return of interest.

"Not now, later on" she said quietly. "I will try to sleep first. I'm sure I could sleep if you would go and rest, Ralph."

"Quite right, you are a wise little woman, Mrs. Denmead," said Dr. Grey.

Ralph allowed himself to be taken off by the younger doctor, seeing that they thought it best he should go. They paused on the way down to visit the next room, where the good-natured landlady sat in a rocking-chair by the fire nursing the latest descendant of Sir Ralph Denmead the Crusader who, instead of being born in a stately castle, had first seen the light in Kingsmead Terrace at a lodging house specially reserved for what the landlady termed "Theat'icals."

Ralph could only thank her for all her help, but he was blessed with the power of expression and the good soul felt fully rewarded for what she had gone through.

"Don't you mention it, sir, it's nothing but a pleasure," she said. "Mrs. Brinton she was here till one o'clock, and a very pleasant spoken lady she is and handy with the child. And, says I to her, the finest grown man I ever see in my life, six foot two in his stocking feet, was not a morsel bigger than this baby to start with. A fine set up man he was as you could wish till he lost his leg along of frost bites and under-feeding in the Crimea."

Ralph looked at the funny little bundle swathed in flannel and almost laughed at the thought of his possible development into a military hero of six foot two, losing a

leg for his country's glory! But the mention of military life made him think of Bridget, and he determined to telegraph to her at once.

Down in the sitting-room they found Macneillie solacing himself with Shakspere and a pipe, and delighted to hear the more favourable report.

"You have been up all night, Governor," said Ralph regretfully, when the doctor had gone.

"Well, yes, I was afraid you might need me," said Macneillie. "I had hardly dared to hope for this good news. Come, sit down and eat, boy, you are nearly played out. I brewed some coffee for you, but I don't know whether it is fit to drink now."

Ralph obeyed, eating like a hungry school boy, and his face gradually assumed a less ghastly hue.

"What time is rehearsal?" he asked glancing at his watch. "Hullo! I forgot to wind it, and it has run down."

"It's now eight," said Macneillie. "Rehearsal is at eleven, but you won't be needed. I am going to play Hamlet."

"No, Governor," said Ralph emphatically. "I shall be all right after a little sleep, and it was almost the first thing Evereld thought of. Isn't she a model actor's wife?"

He knew well that to play Hamlet was almost more than Macneillie could endure, for long ago the Manager had told him that he had acted it every night before Christine Greville's wedding, and that it had become so bound up with all the mental misery he had gone through at that time that he had never dared to attempt it again.

"Ah, she remembered it," said Macneillie with a smile. "That was very like Evereld. I would put off the performance if possible, but it is promised for three nights and it will be very difficult to manage anything else, specially as Ivy Grant is *hors de combat*, too, and her understudy such a novice. No, we will give the play; I have

spent most of the night in company with the Danish prince and this evening he and I will patch up our ancient quarrel."

But Ralph was not to be borne down by these arguments, and at last Macneillie agreed to a compromise. The play had already been rehearsed for some time. Ralph should be excused from attendance that morning, and if all were well should play the part as arranged.

"Now no more of this argle-bargle as we say in Scotland. To bed with you, or we shall have you breaking down this evening," said Macneillie. "What? a letter you must write?"

"Only to Mrs. Hereford, who you know had promised to house Evereld during her illness."

"I will see to it," said Macneillie. "And you want this telegram to go to that nice old Irish body, the soldier's widow? Well, leave them to me, and get along with you, do. Follow the excellent example of that son of yours, and spend your time in sleeping."

Ralph took the advice very literally and for the next eight hours slept profoundly. He was roused at last to a consciousness that someone was standing beside his bed, and looking up sleepily was vaguely astonished to see Bridget's well-known face. Was he a boy again in Sir Matthew's house? And was Bridget as usual coming in to rouse him that he might not incur his guardian's wrath by being late for breakfast? His heavy eyelids drooped again, when he was suddenly startled back to full recollection by the sound of a wailing baby in the room below.

"Why, that must be the boy," he reflected. "And I am a family man,—and Sir Matthew has gone to Jericho! What news, Bridget?" he exclaimed anxiously. "How is my wife?"

"She is doing nicely, sir, God bless her sweet soul! Your dinner is ready, Mr. Ralph, and after that, why you

can be coming in to see mistress. She has had two good sleeps, thank God."

Bridget was in her element with the sole care of the little doll-like baby.

"It's exactly like you, sir, bless it," she remarked when Ralph paused on his way to the theatre to take another look at his small son.

"Well, really, Bridget! You can't expect me to take that for a compliment," he said laughing. "He has no eyes to speak of—just a couple of slits—and as for his face, it seems to be all nose, with just a little margin of pink puckers."

"Ah, it's always the outsiders that can see the likeness," said Bridget.

"Look here upon this picture, and on this," quoted Ralph merrily. "You will send me off to play Hamlet in a very humble and chastened mood, Bridget. I never thought I was quite so ugly."

As a matter of fact the great strain he had passed through, and the present relief, quite blunted the feeling of intense nervousness which usually overwhelmed him when for the first time he played an important character. All his fellow actors too were in sympathy with him, and it did his heart good to hear what they said as to Evereld's prompt courage and her plucky rescue of Ivy Grant. The news from the hospital was also cheering. Ivy was going on as well as could be expected, and although her burns were severe, she was likely to be able to resume her work in two or three months' time, and thanks to Evereld she was not at all disfigured.

Ralph's long and patient study of his part bore excellent fruit. He gave a really striking representation of Hamlet's lovable and strangely complex character; and Macneillie watched his pupil with satisfaction, feeling to-night more than he had ever done before that Ralph had in him the makings of a really great actor.

"If only that brave little wife of his is spared," he thought to himself, "his future is assured. But he is the sort of man who might be altogether paralysed by a great sorrow. I should fancy it was the early loss of his wife which turned the Vicar of Whinhaven into a recluse, and according to Ralph it was certainly a great trouble and disappointment which finally killed the poor man. What develops one kind of nature ruins another."

In the course of the next few days there was a great deal of anxiety both on account of Evereld and of the child. In the midst of it there suddenly appeared upon the scenes the one person who was most capable of cheering and helping them all.

Mrs. Hereford, with her sweet bright face, the youthfulness and vivacity of which contrasted so curiously with her prematurely grey hair, took them all by surprise and was quietly announced one afternoon at the house in Kingsmead Terrace.

"How good of you to come!" cried Ralph, feeling as if the mere sight of her had lifted a load from his mind.

"And how is Evereld?" she asked. "They told me at the door she was better, but I wasn't sure how much the little servant knew."

"She is better to-day," said Ralph with a sigh. "But all last night we were terribly anxious again, I think it was worrying over the child's illness."

"He is very delicate I am afraid," said Mrs. Hereford.

"Yes, but they are hopeful about him now. Yesterday they thought him dying, and I had to rush out for a clergyman to get him christened."

"And to go off to your work in the evening I suppose not knowing how things would be when you came back."

"Yes," said Ralph. "That was the worst part of all. It was my third appearance as Hamlet, and I all but broke down."

"I well remember what an agony it used to be to sing in

public when Dermot or Molly were dangerously ill," said Mrs. Hereford. "And talking of Dermot reminds me of what I came to propose this afternoon. He is much stronger but the doctor doesn't care for him to be in London just yet. I think of taking a house here till the Easter recess, and when Evereld can be moved we think it would be a capital plan if she came to us here instead of in town. I am not going to be defrauded of my visitor by this provoking catastrophe. I have been looking this afternoon at a furnished house which is to let in Lansdowne Crescent, and if all goes well I don't see why in a fortnight or three weeks' time Evereld and her baby should not come to us there. I suppose you will have to move on elsewhere with the company?"

"Yes," said Ralph, "I must leave next Monday, but luckily we shall only be at Bristol so I can run over pretty often."

"And we shall always be delighted to have you for your Sundays later on," said Mrs. Hereford, "don't you think it would be better for Evereld to come to us? She will be rather lonely here."

"Oh, it would be the best thing in the world for her to be with you," said Ralph. "But it will be disarranging all your plans I am afraid,—and putting you to so much trouble."

"Not at all," said Mrs. Hereford. "Evereld and I shall both be widowed during the week, that is the only drawback; but husbands must work. And in any case I should have had to take Dermot somewhere, for he is the last boy to take care of himself and will do the most mad things if he hasn't a sister to look after him. I tell him it is becoming such a tax that I shall really have to take to matchmaking and select him a nice capable wife who would see that he wore his great-coat in an east wind, and didn't always sit in a direct draught. Ah, here is Mr. Macneillie, we must tell him of our plans."

Macneillie rang for tea, and then they discussed the future arrangements of which he cordially approved.

"And how about the poor little thing who was burnt? Is she getting on well?" asked Mrs. Hereford.

"I have just been to see her," said Macneillie. "Miss Orme and I took her some flowers. She is suffering a great deal still poor child, but they say she is wonderfully patient."

"I don't seem to remember her. Was she with you at Southbourne?"

"No, she has only been with us a year," said Macneillie. "And was getting on remarkably well. I hope she will be fit to act by Easter. She had a very narrow escape, and owed her life to Mrs. Denmead's presence of mind and courage! They will be greater friends than ever after this."

"I should like to go and see her," said Mrs. Hereford. "Or is she hardly up to visitors yet?"

"Oh, she would like to see you," said Ralph, "for she has heard so much about you."

"I am not going to ask to see Evereld to-day, for I am quite sure she ought to be kept absolutely quiet," said Mrs. Hereford. "You must tell her how much I look forward to having her later on. Suppose we walk round to the hospital now. There will just be time before my return train."

Her cheery sensible talk did more for Ralph than anything else could have done; he poured out all his anxieties to her, and found in her motherly wisdom and her hopeful words exactly what he needed to tide him over the difficulties which overwhelmed him.

"What is it about her?" he thought to himself, as he paced up and down outside the hospital while she paid her visit to Ivy. "She seems to me just like a gleam of sunshine on a dark day, or a fresh breeze in the summer. I have met plenty of Irish women who were friendly and

pleasant and delightful to talk to, but it isn't a mere matter of charm with her,—she seems to have a heart wide enough to take in every one that is in trouble."

Doreen Hereford did not find it difficult to make room in her heart for one so helpless and forlorn as Ivy. The merest glance at the wistful face in the hospital ward was sufficient. And Ivy responded to her at once and felt all the comfort of her presence. For Doreen never patronised people, she mothered them; and between these two forms of helpfulness there lies a world of difference.

"Tell me a little more about that poor child," she said to Ralph as they walked to the station. "You have known her for a long time, have you not."

"Yes, her grandfather used to give me elocution lessons, she has been on the stage since she was ten and has had rather a hard apprenticeship. Evereld has taken a great fancy to her and she needs friends, poor girl, for she is quite alone in the world. The old Professor died just after our Scotch company broke up."

"I have been wondering what she will do when she leaves the hospital," said Mrs. Hereford. "Would Evereld like it if I asked her to stay with us too? Or wouldn't that work well?"

"I am sure she would like it," said Ralph. "But will you have room for them all?"

"Oh yes," she said laughing. "It's a big house, and besides we Irish people know how to stow away large numbers. I want somehow to see more of little Miss Grant, there is something very winning about her. Talk it over by and bye with Evereld and see what she thinks."

CHAPTER XXXVI

"The comfort which poor human beings want in such a world as this is not the comfort of ease, but the comfort of strength."

C. KINGSLEY.

EVERELD thought the whole plan a most delightful one, and if anything could have consoled her for the parting with Ralph on Monday it would have been the prospect of spending the time of her convalescence with Bride O'Ryan and Mrs. Hereford, and of knowing that Ivy was not to be left out in the cold but was to enjoy just the same hospitality and care.

On the Sunday she was allowed to see Myra Brinton for the first time. Perhaps the events of the week had done more for Myra than for anyone else; she had been so horrified to discover what mischief her sentimental fancy for Ralph, her jealousy of Evereld and her quarrel with Ivy had wrought, that she had taken herself thoroughly in hand, and had learnt a lesson she would never forget. As for the baby, it played no small part in her education, and Bridget was always delighted that she should come in and make much of it.

"I don't know how to thank you enough," said Evereld looking up at her gratefully. "They have all told me how good and helpful you were last Monday, when no one had time to think much of Baby Dick."

"Is he to be called Dick?" said Myra willing to turn the conversation from herself.

"Yes, after my brother who died. Have you seen Ivy yet?"

"Oh, several times," said Myra. "I wanted just to tell

you that everything is quite right between us again. I was very wrong, Evereld, to tell you what I did at Mardentown. It was all a mistake and I little thought what it would lead to. If poor Ivy had not been in a hurry to be out of my way before I came back to the dressing-room, I do believe the accident would never have happened. My horrible gossip might have been the death of both of you. I can never forget that."

"Don't let us ever talk of it again," said Evereld. "We shall all three be closer friends for the rest of our lives just because this has happened. That's the only thing that matters now. And Myra, I wanted to ask you to be Dick's Godmother. You had all the trouble of him at first, and so he seems rightly to belong to you. Mr. Macneillie has promised to be one of the Godfathers."

This was the finishing touch to the reconciliation and a very happy thought on the part of the little mother. Nothing could have pleased Myra more, and she left Bath a much happier and a much better woman.

Evereld made herself as happy as she could with her baby and with old Bridget as companions, but her convalescence was tedious, and she was unspeakably glad when at length the day arrived for her removal to the Hereford's house in Lansdowne Crescent.

The beautiful view of the Somersetshire hills and of the grey city in the valley below, which she gained from her window, the cheerful sense of family life going on all about her, the companionship of Bride O'Ryan, and the comfort of having Mrs. Hereford always at hand to advise her about Dick and to share all her anxieties, seemed exactly what she needed.

Her voice recovered its tone, her cheeks regained their fresh bright colour, and she became once more just a girl again, ready to enjoy life in her own quiet fashion."

"I could almost fancy we were back at school," said Bride cheerfully.

"When, as at present I'm in the shade with the light

behind me," quoted Evereld merrily. "My hands are about the worst part of me now, they are so horribly white, otherwise you must own that I am quite presentable. How strange it seems though to think of the life at Southbourne. It was so happy while it lasted, but the thought of going back to it is dreadful."

"Instead you spend half the day in playing with Dick," said Bride teasingly. "The amount of time you waste on that child is appalling."

"I'm not going to be one of those horrid modern mothers who never have time to see their own babies," said Evereld. "It would have been wrong to have had him at all if I didn't mean to be his best friend from the very beginning right through his life."

"Do you mean him to be an actor?" asked Bride, looking at the funny little face nestled close to Evereld and wondering what it would develop into.

"I should like it if he has all that is needed to make one," said Evereld, "but who can prophesy whether he has any special gift, or whether he has patience for all the drudgery it involves?"

"Tell me what you really think of the life, now that you have had some experience of it," said Bride. "Quite candidly, don't you find it very monotonous?"

"No, I have found it very interesting," said Evereld. "I can fancy though that it must be trying to do nothing but one play for many hundreds of nights. In a company like ours you see we get plenty of variety."

"And you don't mind the moving about week by week?"

"Oh, sometimes it is tiresome, but there are many advantages. Mr. Macneillie knows a host of interesting people, all over the country, and they are generally very hospitable to us; besides I like getting to know fresh places, and as a rule the journeys are not very long or tiring. Sometimes I used to get a little bored by the in-

cessant talk about things connected with the stage. But that would be just the same in any other profession. Don't you remember how at the château we used to get so weary of the talk between Mr. Magnay and his two artist friends? They say it is exactly the same among authors, when two or three of them are together they can't help talking shop. And as to clergymen, why they are proverbial! I suppose Kingsley was the only one who ever did entirely banish 'clerical shop' from his home talk."

"Well, I think you are very wonderful people to be able to travel about for so long without losing your tempers or quarrelling like the Kilkenny cats," said Bride. "There's nothing on earth so trying to the temper as going about with people. I suppose that's why they always make an unfortunate married couple travel on the continent. They learn in that way what sort of life is in store for them."

Evereld laughed. "You know we do now and then quarrel a little, but as a rule we are all very friendly. There is only one thing I cannot stand, and I hope we shall never have such an infliction again."

"What is that?" said Bride smiling at her friend's vehemence.

"A wealthy amateur who thinks he can act but can't," said Evereld. "Oh, if you knew what we have endured all the autumn from an empty-headed fellow, who thought himself a genius!"

"What did he do?" said Bride.

"What did he not do! He was insufferably rude to Mr. Macneillie, he hated Ralph because he wanted the Juvenile Lead himself, he treated all the other men as though they were beneath contempt, he persecuted all the ladies of the company with tiresome attentions, and he was always dragging into the conversation the names of titled people of his acquaintance, or dropping coroneted envelopes in a casual way. Somehow he contrived to set

us all at sixes and sevens, and there was joy throughout the company when at last something offended him and he suddenly brought his engagement to an end."

Bride laughed heartily as she heard of the stratagem by which the Manager had contrived to bring about this much desired event.

"Who would ever think that Mr. Macneillie had so much fun in him as you describe," she said. "His face is grave almost to sternness."

"Yes, but when it does light up he hardly looks like the same man," said Evereld. "I don't think he would ever have stood the wear and tear of his life if it hadn't been for his strong vein of humour."

And with that she fell to musing on the strange fact which most people discover sooner or later, that it is not the prosperous and happy people who as a rule are blessed with this divine gift of a sense of the humourous, but the people whose lives are clouded with care and anxiety, or those who have to go about the world with an aching heart, or to bear the consequences of another's sin. To such as these often enough, by some mysterious law of compensation, there comes a power, not only of feeling the pathos of life more acutely, but of perceiving in everything—even in matters connected with their own sorrows—the subtle touches of humour which keep life healthy and pure.

She noticed it very much in Dermot O'Ryan, who young as he was had passed through a hard apprenticeship of ill health, misfortune, political imprisonment, and misunderstanding that to one of his temperament was excessively hard to bear.

He was the only one of the O'Ryans who had any literary tastes, and now being cut off by his recent illness from active political life he was busy with a Memoir of his father, a well-known man in the Fenian rising of '65, who had died from the effects of his subsequent imprisonment.

Dermot was a thorough Kelt, and Evereld thought his sweet-tempered, philosophic patience, made him a most delightful companion. They had liked each other at Southbourne, and had become firm friends during Evereld's stay at Auvergne, so that they quickly fell into very easy terms of intimacy. They were sitting together in the large sunny drawing-room and Bride was reading a page of the Memoir upon which Dermot wanted a special criticism, when Mrs. Hereford returned from the hospital bringing Ivy with her. Dermot looked up rather curiously to see the girl of whom he had heard so much, but instead of a beautiful and striking face which he could either have admired or criticised, he saw a little childish creature, with startled blue-grey eyes and a wistful face which was not exactly pretty but was somehow more fascinating than if it had possessed more regular features.

At sight of Evereld, Ivy forgot everything and ran across the room to greet her; she was so small and graceful and light that it seemed almost as if, like the birds, she had special air cells in her bones, for her movements had in them something altogether unusual so that merely to watch her limbs was keen delight.

She had, too, an eager quick way of talking, and by the time she had been introduced to Dermot he felt that the scrap of a hand put into his had carried away his heart.

"I have heard of you from Mrs. Denmead," she said. "You were one of the imprisoned patriots."

"Oh, most of us have a turn at that sort of thing," he said smiling. "It's part of an Irishman's training."

Bride made some remark about the manuscript, and the talk became general, Ivy entering this new world with a sense of keen interest, and quite in the humour to study Irish history with Dermot as schoolmaster.

During her illness she had had more leisure to think than had ever before been the case. For five weeks there

had been nothing to do, but to keep quiet and to recover as steadily as might be. At first she had suffered too much to make any use of the time, but later on, when she was convalescent, there were long hours when she learnt more of the real truth of things than she had hitherto grasped. The mere physical pain seemed afterwards to fit her to understand what had hitherto been a riddle to her, and the strong feeling for Evereld which grew and deepened in her heart did wonders for her. All her nature seemed to have become more tender and sweet; and whereas in time past she would have flirted violently with Dermot and played with him as a cat plays with a mouse, she seemed now to have laid aside all her silly little affectations and coquetries, and to be capable of realising that love is not a game, or a pastime, or a selfish having, but rather the entrance to all that is most sacred, the mutual sacrifice of self, the nearest approach of humanity to the life divine.

Dermot made no secret of his admiration for the little actress, it was quite patent to all observers, but his devotion was so unlike anything she had hitherto come across in life that Ivy herself was never startled by it. She quietly drifted into love with him, waking into an altogether new world as she did so, a world far removed from the reach of men like Mr. Vane-Ffoulkes with their compliments, and their presents, and their so-called love, which she knew all the time to be nothing but thinly-veiled selfishness.

At last one day, when Ivy was out driving with Mrs. Hereford, Dermot seized the opportunity of a confidential talk with Evereld as she sat at work by the fire.

"I want you to give me your advice," he began, throwing down his pen and drawing a little nearer to her. "Do you think there is any hope at all for me with Miss Grant? I am sure you know without any telling that I fell in love with her the moment she came here. Do you think there is any hope for me?"

"That depends," said Evereld thoughtfully.

"Depends on what?" he asked eagerly.

"Well, you see Ivy really cares for her profession and is just beginning to succeed in it. I don't think she would consent to retire."

"I could never allow my wife to remain on the stage," said Dermot his face clouding.

"Then I don't think you have any business to go to the theatre," said Evereld. "Every woman you see on the stage is somebody's wife or somebody's daughter."

"If one realised that, the disgusting things which amuse some audiences would fail for want of support," said Dermot musingly. "Not that I imagine for a moment that Miss Grant would ever accept an engagement of which she really disapproved. Doreen would agree with her as to sticking to her profession, and perhaps she is right."

"Having got on so well while she is young," said Evereld, "for she won't be eighteen till May, there seems every prospect of her soon getting to a really good position. And there is a sort of fascination about her—she is always popular."

"You mean that I shall have a host of rivals."

"Possibly, but you are early in the field and indeed I think you stand a very good chance."

"Do you think it would be wrong if I spoke to her now? Would it spoil the rest of this time for her?"

"Well that would depend on the answer she gave you," said Evereld laughing. "But indeed I think Ivy is just the sort of girl who would be happier if engaged while she is quite young. You see she is much in the position I was in—quite alone in the world with no relations and but few friends."

So Dermot, who detested waiting and was never at a loss for words, seized an early opportunity of urging his suit, and Max Hereford, coming down from town on the

following Saturday, was greeted by his wife with the news that the two were just engaged.

"I told you what the result would be when you hospitably invited that little actress," he said laughing. "There never was such a matchmaker as you are, mavourneen. I knew something had happened the moment I caught sight of your face."

"They are so happy," she said smiling, "and Ivy is so gentle and sweet; Dermot will be exactly the right sort of husband for her I do believe. And she will make him just the capable, brisk, bright little wife that such a dreamy philosopher needs."

"But I do hope they are not going to marry upon Dermot's penwork," said Max Hereford. "He is making a good income now, but of course one can't tell when he may be laid up, for I fear he will never be strong."

"Oh, they are quite content to wait for five or six years," said Mrs. Hereford. "And I am thankful to say Dermot's Eastern ideas as to wives are being overcome by Ivy's practical good sense. She won't hear of giving up her work, and in a talk I had with her the other day she spoke so sensibly of professional life, which she knows pretty thoroughly, that I am sure she is right about it. She has the makings of a very fine character in her, and I shall not be surprised if Dermot's marriage proves as great a success as Michael's has done."

"We shall now not be happy until Mollie and Bride are arranged for," said Max Hereford teasingly, "and then there are our own children coming on, so you have your work cut out for you, dear. By and bye there will be match-making for the nieces and nephews, and after that no doubt a few grandchildren coming on. So you will be able to keep your hand in."

"And isn't it the least I can be doing then, since my own married life has been so happy?" she said laughing.

Ivy, who had not yet seen Mr. Hereford, stood rather in

awe of him and looked up apprehensively when her future brother-in-law came into the drawing-room where she was helping Dermot with some proofs. However his greeting was so kindly and his congratulations to Dermot sounded so genuine that her fears were soon set at rest; she felt that the family had fully adopted her and that she was no longer one of the waifs of the world.

CHAPTER XXXVII

"The grace of God, the light and life that flow from His indwelling, can lift the very weariest and hardest-driven soul into a dignity of endurance, a radiance of faith, a simplicity of love, far above all that this world can give or take away." DEAN PAGET.

BUT perhaps no one so thoroughly rejoiced in the news of the engagement as Myra Brinton. It was Ivy herself who first told her, when she and Evereld with Bridget and Dick in attendance rejoined the company at Worcester. Ralph had of course heard all about it the first Sunday he had visited them at Bath, but he had kept his own counsel, for Ivy preferred telling her own news herself both to Macneillie and to her friends in the company.

Nothing could so completely have restored peace and harmony between Myra and Ivy, all the past mistakes and disagreements faded into oblivion, and the two became once more excellent friends.

As for little Dick he soon became the darling of the whole company. Thanks to Bridget's good management he throve wonderfully, spent most of his time in sleeping, seldom cried, and behaved with discretion on journeys, to the immense satisfaction of his mother, who proudly reflected that not even the most crabbed old bachelor in the company could ever complain that Dick was in the way.

Like a true Denmead he was thoroughly well-bred and had a way of accommodating himself to all surroundings; but Evereld saw he would run an excellent chance of being spoilt as soon as he grew a little older, for everyone made much of him and he received votive offerings in such profusion that it became difficult to pack them. Even the low comedy man broke his rule of silence so far as to

inquire occasionally after his health, and at Christmas presented him with a magnificent red and blue clown who shook his head to solemn music.

As to Macneillie, though he had always professed total indifference to children, he was completely subjugated by the wiles of his Godson. Either from insight into character, or from some consideration of the strong hands and arms which held him so delightfully, Dick preferred the manager to anyone else in the world; his father's long slender hands and taper fingers were not to be compared for a moment with the comfort of the highlander's firm and comfortable grasp. And Macneillie found it impossible to resist the subtle flattery of this small worshipper who was always ready to laugh and shout with glee at the mere sight of him. In his darkest hours the little elf would often cajole him into a temporary forgetfulness, seeming indeed to take a special delight in beguiling him into a romp whenever his clouded brow betokened that his own great trouble and the bitter thought of Christine's lonely and difficult life were weighing him down.

On the whole the years which followed the birth of Ralph's child were as happy as any Macneillie had known since Christine's marriage, and as tranquil as his life was ever likely to be. Ralph and Evereld were like a son and daughter to him, and both were able to do much to help him in the busy and harassing days which fall to the lot of most managers.

Still there was no denying that his private troubles had more or less shattered his health; he worked on bravely, as had always been his custom, but now and then an intolerable sense of weariness crept over him and he would wonder how much longer he could keep going.

At last, soon after Dick had celebrated his second birthday, the manager suddenly broke down.

There was nothing which could definitely account for his failure; he had indeed been very busy with prepara-

tions for the Shaksperian Performances at Stratford-on-Avon, which were that year to be given by his company during the birthday week. But hard work seldom does people any harm. It was rather that he had for years been bearing a load which overtaxed his strength and at last, from sheer exhaustion, nature gave way.

His old enemy, utter sleeplessness, returned to torment him, and there was nothing for it but to obey the doctor's orders and go to Scotland for rest and change.

"You are looking sorely fagged, Hugh," was his mother's comment when on the evening of his arrival at Callander they sat together by the fireside. It was some months since she had seen him and she was quick to note that he was hollow-cheeked and that his face, as she expressed it, "looked all eyes."

"Scottish air will soon cure me," he said with forced cheerfulness. "I shall sleep to-night."

"Ah lad," she said with a sigh, "and what reason is there that you should not be always breathing your native air? If you had but chosen the calling I would have had you choose, how different all might have been."

"Yes, we might now have been sitting in the most comfortable Manse," said Macneillie, a gleam of humour lighting up his grave face. "Instead of a lean and hard-worked actor, roaming from place to place, I might have been a portly minister revered by half the neighbourhood."

"I believe you are tired of your wandering life after all," she said, scrutinizing his careworn face with her keen eyes.

"Deadly tired," he admitted with a sigh. "But what has that to do with it? Are not half the manses in the land filled with weary men who would give anything for a change in the dull routine of the work they are called to do? It is the same with all of us, Mother. However much we love our profession there must be hard times now

and again, and somehow we have got to live through them like men."

She did not reply, but silently knitted away at one of his socks, thinking to herself how different his life would have been had she had the ordering of it. He should have come to great honour, should have been a noted preacher filling a high position in Edinburgh, he should have married well, and about her in her old age troops of grandchildren should have played. As it was, his life had she felt been wrecked by the luckless taste for dramatic art which had puzzled her so much from his childhood upwards. She laid all his misfortunes to that strange and unaccountable passion for acting which she was wholly unable to comprehend. It was this which had brought him into contact with Christine Greville, this which had debarred him from marriage, this which had for years prevented him from settling down, and forced him to lead the life of a wanderer.

"Hugh," she said, "is it even now too late? Could you not give up acting and do something more worthy of your powers?"

He started as though someone had struck him a blow.

"Give up my profession?" he said in amazement. "Why no, mother, I could never do that. I am tired out and in a grumbling mood but you must not take me too literally. My vocation has saved me again and again from making utter shipwreck. Depend upon it no other work is as you would say 'more worthy' of me."

She urged it no more; but the old sore feeling that his mother could not understand his point of view, that she still in her heart desired him to take up work for which he was wholly unfitted, came back to mar the entire peace of Macneillie's holiday.

On the Saturday before Holy Week he could no longer resist the restless craving for change which took possession of him as his strength gradually returned. And ta-

king leave of his mother he left Callander and travelled down to Stratford, intending there to await the arrival of his company later on.

It was a mild bright afternoon in mid April when he reached the quiet little town. It seemed to sleep tranquilly in the golden sunshine, scarcely a breath of air stirred the trees, the beautiful spire of the stately old church rose into the bluest of skies, and the green fields flecked with daisies seemed to be just the right setting for a picture so fair and peaceful. The pastoral character of the scenery somehow suited Macneillie's mood better even than the rugged mountains of his own land. Surely in this quiet loveliness, rich in associations with the great Master he could gain the rest and the ease he so grievously needed!

He would spend his days on the river, would not allow any business anxieties or arrangements for the following week to invade his repose; Shakspere and Shakspere's country should hearten him for the future—the quiet of Holy Week should lift him up out of the depression which sought to drag him back into its dreary torture chambers.

So he thought to himself on the evening of his arrival; forgetting that "through the shadow of an agony cometh redemption";—never dreaming that in this most tranquil place he was to be confronted with the worst ordeal of his whole life.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

"World's use is cold—world's love is vain,—
World's cruelty is bitter bane;
But pain is not the fruit of pain."

E. B. BROWNING.

IF life during the past three years had been difficult for Macneillie it had been tenfold more difficult for Christine Greville. As everyone had foreseen, her position called for a strength of character which she did not possess, for a power of endurance which she was only learning by slow degrees, and for that sound judgment and prompt womanly wisdom which had never been her strong point.

She had indeed resigned the cares and anxieties of Management, but this also meant that she was obliged to put up with whatever arrangements commended themselves to Barry Sterne at the theatre; and though he and his wife had always been good friends to her she was often unable to approve of his way of looking at things.

They had nearly come to a serious disagreement when he engaged Dudley the comedian assuring her that the man had quite lived down his past. And though time had more or less reconciled her to this belief, she was never quite without the instinct which had made Myra Kay shrink from the man in Scotland. She grew to feel a little more confidence in him when one day he happened to mention Ralph Denmead in her presence. It was not so much what he said, but rather his tone and expression when referring to Ralph.

"So young Denmead is to play Orlando at Stratford next month, I see," he observed one morning before re-

hearsal. "That boy will do well if I'm not mistaken. There was a touch of genius about him even when I knew him as a half-starved novice in Scotland."

"Did you know him then?" said Christine for the first time volunteering an unnecessary remark to Dudley. "He used to tell me when I was acting with him in Edinburgh what straits he had been reduced to during the spring."

"Yes, we had a rough time, but he was always a plucky, goodnatured fellow ready to take the fortune of war. I'm glad he has fallen on his feet. Macneillie has been the making of him."

"They say Macneillie's health has broken down," said another actor strolling up. "He has gone to Scotland to recruit."

"He has been roaming about the world too long," remarked a third. "I wonder he doesn't give up his travelling company and settle in town. It would be better for him in every way."

"Well he's doing very good work," said Dudley. "As a matter of fact his company and Lorimer's are the only training schools we have for the stage. How can the rising generation learn otherwise in these days of long runs?"

The arrival of Barry Sterne checked the conversation at this moment and Christine turned away sick at heart, to get through her work as well as she could to the tune of those haunting words—"His health has broken down!"

Was it true? Or had some lying paragraph in a newspaper set afloat a false report?

Her whole nature seemed to rise up in rebellion against the miserable ignorance of his movements to which she was doomed. It tortured her to think that dozens of people who were wholly indifferent to him knew all, while she was racked with anxiety and fear on his behalf.

She went home feeling wretched beyond expression; even Charlie's eager greeting could not bring a smile to her face or ease her pain.

"Auntie," he exclaimed, "there's a lady in the drawing-room waiting to see you. She has been here a long time, and she would wait for you. Susan says she looks as if she were in great trouble."

"What name did she give?" asked Christine, her mind still full of Hugh Macneillie's illness, and a terror seizing her that some bearer of ill news had come.

Dugald Linklater handed her a card which bore a name quite unknown to her,—Mrs. Bouvery. She rose with a sigh of weariness.

"Don't wait for me, Charlie," she said, "I am not hungry and will interview this lady first."

Everything in Christine's drawing-room was in the perfection of taste, there were no bright colours, no incongruous mixtures, the prevailing tint was a quiet low-toned blue: birds sang in the window, and everywhere her love of growing plants manifested itself. Nothing could have been more restful and harmonious than the effect of the whole, and probably no one could have seemed more tranquil and self-possessed than the graceful fair-haired woman who came forward to greet her visitor, though all the time beneath the surface her restless heart was full of passionate pain.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting so long," she said, her clear musical voice making each syllable a separate delight to the ear. As she spoke she looked wonderingly into the hard grief-worn face of the elderly lady who had risen as she entered and had coldly acknowledged her greeting.

There was an uncomfortable pause.

"Can I do anything for you?" said Christine, wondering whether her visitor had called for a subscription, or whether she was perhaps the mother of some stage-struck girl come for advice?

"Yes," said Mrs. Bouvery, "you can listen to what I have to tell you. You have broken my daughter's heart madam, you have ruined her life."

Nervous terror began to fill Christine's mind. Surely this lady must be mad. She instinctively measured the distance from the place where she was sitting to the door.

"I do not understand you," she faltered. "There must be some mistake. I do not even know your name."

"Your name unfortunately is only too familiar to us, however," said her visitor remorselessly. "My daughter was engaged to be married to Captain Karey and until he had the misfortune to see you on the stage she was perfectly happy. From that day however, all her misery dated. He was infatuated about you and you lured him on to his death.

"Madam," said Christine pale with indignation, "you do me a very great wrong. I never encouraged Captain Karey. On the contrary his persistent attentions annoyed me very much."

"Oh, so you say! so they all say!" said Mrs. Bouvery choking back a sob. "But I don't believe a word of it. You actresses are all alike; as long as your vanity is satisfied you don't care what wretchedness you cause to others."

"Is it possible you really believe that I encouraged a mere boy who must have been at least fifteen years my junior?" said Christine incredulously. "The moment I saw there was the least risk of anything serious, I would have nothing more to do with him. Every one of the presents he tried to give me were returned immediately. What more could I do?"

"You could retire from a profession which is unfit for any woman, you could refuse any longer to make your beauty a snare and a peril to men."

"I think," said Christine quietly, but with a ring of indignation in her voice, "you forget that some of the very best of women have been on the stage. Is art to be crippled, and are we all to retire to nunneries, because some men are weak fools and some men vicious knaves?"

"I do not care to argue with you," said her visitor coldly. "The fact remains that you have spoilt my daughter's whole life."

"Indeed I am very sorry for her," said Christine with a sigh. "I can't blame myself for what has happened, but I can feel very much grieved about it."

"Whether you blame yourself or not," said Mrs. Bouvery, "Captain Karey's death will be laid to your account at the last day."

"His death?" cried Christine with dilated eyes. "What do you mean? I had heard nothing."

"Oh you had not seen it in the papers? Yes, he died three days ago from an over-dose of chloral—it was brought in as 'death by misadventure.' I do not envy you your feelings at this moment. It was a sad day for him when he first saw you, for him and for my poor daughter."

Christine did not speak a word. She was horror-struck by the news so abruptly told her; it was no time to assert her own blamelessness, nay she could pardon the poor grief-stricken woman for reproaching her so bitterly, for insulting her by such cruel, false imputations. The admir r whose love letters had so greatly annoyed her, whose infatuation had for some time past been difficult to baffle, had been driven out of his senses by his unhappy and overmastering passion, and had died leaving the girl who had loved him to her desolate sorrow.

Had Mrs. Bouvery been less hard and bitter, Christine could have opened her heart to her, and made her understand how distorted a view of the case she had taken; as it was they parted almost in silence and she could only resolve to find out a little more about the daughter and if possible to write to her later on.

But for many days after that the story haunted her and made her miserable. Afterwards too, in her depression, the thought of Mrs. Bouvery's cruel words returned to her.

"Had I not been a solitary woman she would never have dared to attack me like that," she reflected with tears in her eyes. "A woman without a protector is at the mercy of anyone who chooses to torment her. Were I not worse than widowed, Lord Rosscourt and men of his type would be unable to persecute me with attentions that are insults. They would not dare to send me letters which one can hardly glance at without feeling defiled."

It happened that among her best and most trusted friends was a certain literary man named Conway Sartoris. She had known him and the sensible middle-aged sister who kept house for him for the last ten years, and they had been the first to discern how very miserable was her married life. During the difficult years that followed her separation their entirely unaltered friendship had been a great comfort to her. Conway Sartoris was not only a brilliant writer and an advanced thinker, but a most delightful companion, full of dry humour, and shrewd common sense; while his sister had a genuine affection for Christine and always gave her a warm welcome at their pretty old-fashioned house in Westminster. She was dining with them on the following Sunday and found it a great relief to tell them of the tragedy with which so unwittingly she had become connected, and of Mrs. Bouvery's interview.

Alas! in seeking comfort she only met with fresh trouble. For the next evening on her return from the theatre she found a long letter from Conway Sartoris in which he frankly admitted that his friendship had some time ago deepened into love, that he was sure her life would always be difficult and perilous without a protector, and that he would do his utmost to make her happy. In blank dismay Christine read his proposal that they should enter into a union which would virtually be a marriage; he quoted instances in which such unions had been after a time condoned by society and had proved eminently

happy, and he argued very plausibly that the best way to bring about a speedy reform of the present unjust law under which she suffered was to add another instance to the cases in which it had been deliberately and conscientiously broken.

His pleading, as far as he himself was concerned, proved of course quite useless. Christine could only write in reply that her friendship and respect for him must always remain unaltered, but that her heart was still with the lover of her youth—the man who through her own weakness and ambition had been so cruelly sacrificed years ago.

To this she received a very straightforward and kindly answer, and Conway Sartoris entreated her not to allow what had passed in any way to affect their friendship. But this was more easily said than done. His avowal had put an end to the perfect ease and rest of their intercourse and she felt more than ever alone in the world.

Another result of this episode was that his arguments were constantly recurring to her mind. Surely there was great force in the suggestion he had brought forward in his masterly clear-headed way? Were there not bound to be exceptions to every rule? Was not Hugh Macneillie's notion of obedience even to an unjust law, because it was the law of the land, an overstrained nicety? It might be a counsel of perfection, but surely it could not be the actual duty of each citizen? Hugh had such an element of austerity about his life; kind and genial and tolerant as he was with regard to others his own notions of right and wrong were so rigid. He was certainly old-fashioned, not up to date, not able to accommodate himself to *fin de siécle* conditions.

"I will not let him wreck his life!" she thought, pacing with agitated steps up and down her room. "My heart is breaking for want of him, and he is ill and alone. What do I care for the tongues of narrow-minded, conventional people who know nothing of our real story? 'Let them

rave!' He is mine and I am his. All the unfair unequal laws in the world can't alter that."

Just then she happened to notice a letter upon the mantel-piece which by some oversight she had left unopened.

"What is this?" she exclaimed glancing through it. "An invitation from Mrs. Hereford to lunch on Sunday, to meet Ralph Denmead and his wife? Yes, I will go, from them I may at any rate learn how Hugh is."

Her stay at Monkton Verney had led to her becoming a friend of the Herefords; she had an unbounded respect for them both, and at their house in Grosvenor Square she invariably enjoyed herself. Charlie too, liked nothing better than to go there with her, and there was something in the atmosphere of the household which was curiously refreshing and invigorating. They were busy people but they never bored others with their work, and always seemed to have time for merriment, and for keen appreciation of the interests of their friends.

On this Sunday however she was more taken up with the Denmeads than with her host and hostess. There was something in the mere happiness of the young husband and wife that appealed to her, and she had a long talk with them and heard all that she craved to know. Macneillie, they judged by his letters, was still far from well, and even the visit to his own country had failed to do him much good. He was to go on the following day to Stratford and for the sake of quiet would stay just outside the town at a curious old-fashioned house called The Swan's Nest. He would remain there probably until the Birthday week when they were to rejoin him for the performances at the Memorial Theatre.

Then Evereld had much to say about the Manager's kindness to them, of Dick's devotion to him, and all the many little details which her womanly instinct taught her would be to Christine what bread is to the starving. It

was all told naturally and simply and as a matter of course, there was never any uncomfortable consciousness that they knew all about her past and could guess how bitter was her present. It was only when thinking it over afterwards that Christine felt sure that the Denmeads knew the whole truth, and she loved them for their tact and consideration.

But all through the night that followed she was haunted by the thought of Hugh Macneillie ill and alone, unable even to find comfort in his mother's society,—beyond the cure even of his native land.

It is during wakeful nights that burdens usually grow unbearable. And Christine had now reached the point when every consideration but the one prevailing idea is crowded out of the mind.

"I cannot let him suffer any more," she thought. "At all costs this intolerable state of things must and shall be ended. I am free all this week, free till Easter Monday. To-morrow I will go down to Leamington with Charlie and the servants, and the next day I will see him."

CHAPTER XXXIX

"Greatly to do is great, but greater still
Greatly to suffer."

J. Noel Paton.

The following Tuesday proved to be as fine a day as Christine could have wished. Charlie was delighted to fall in with her suggestion of driving from Leamington to Warwick, and she left him with Linklater and his beloved camera to spend a long afternoon in seeing the castle, the church and the many picturesque places to be found in the old town.

"I have to pay a call in the neighbourhood," she explained, "and will meet you here at six o'clock. See that he has plenty to eat, Linklater, for we made a very early lunch."

When they were safely within the castle gates she ordered a Victoria at the hotel and drove in to Stratford. Up to that very moment she had felt eager and alert, ready to dare anything in her desperation. But now when there was no longer anything to do, she lay back in the carriage feeling utterly spent, unable to find the least comfort in the soft spring air, or in the beautiful expanse of country, or in the hedge-rows just bursting into leaf, or in the joyous song of the birds. It was not until they were close to Shakspere's town that her spirit returned to her once more, and as they passed the Roman Catholic Church she sat up and called to her driver.

"I will get out here," she said adjusting her white gossamer travelling veil. "You can drive on and put up at the Shakspere Hotel until I come there."

The man obeyed and she walked on until upon the left

she saw Clopton's Bridge, at the further side of which she knew the Swan's Nest was situated. As usual she was dressed with scrupulous quietness, there was nothing in her black serge coat and skirt and sailor hat to distinguish her from hundreds of other women, and no passer-by would have recognised her through her veil.

Nevertheless her heart failed her somewhat when the little old-fashioned inn with its red brick walls and tiled roof came into sight. She fully realised that she was taking a desperate step.

But then did not desperate diseases require desperate remedies? And had not Hugh Macneillie in the letter he wrote her three and a half years ago entreated her to let him serve her if ever she found herself in a difficulty?

No one else could help her now. He only could shield her and make her life worth living. And was not he ill and in need of her? Was she not fully justified in seeking him? She had paused involuntarily on the bridge lost in thought and now just for a moment the exceeding beauty of the view drew her attention away from her perplexities.

The silvery Avon, crossed a little further down by an old bridge of red brick, the irregular buildings of the little town, the finely proportioned Memorial theatre standing in its gardens upon the river's brink; facing it a lovely pastoral bit of green meadows, and budding trees, and in the distance the old church spire with rooks circling about it.

In the opposite direction lay peaceful fields, and all along the bank pollard willows overhung the stream which curved round in a way that delighted her eye. Just at the bend of the river, moored to a willow tree, a small golden-brown boat was to be seen. It was empty but on the bank above it lay the figure of a man with his head propped on his arm and a book in his hand. She could not distinguish his features at that distance but from something in his attitude she at once knew that it was Hugh Macneillie.

Moreover she could see a corner of the plaid which he had invariably taken about with him, the dark blue and green of the Macneil tartan with its thin alternate cross lines of white and yellow. It was the very same one that in old days had often been spread over her knees on some cold wintry railway journey.

Somehow the sight of this restored her failing heart; she swiftly made her way down to the river-side and youth and hope seemed to come back to her as her feet touched the springy turf and passed lightly over the white and gold of the daisies.

Macneillie, just glancing up from his book, saw a lady approaching clad in the costume which is almost a uniform; he devoutly hoped, after the fashion of celebrities on a holiday, that she would not recognise him.

Christine could so well read his thoughts and understand his slightest gesture that she could hardly help laughing. She put up her veil and walked straight towards him, her brown eyes full of that soft love-light which for years he had not seen in them. As she paused close to him he involuntarily looked up once more, and with a cry sprang to his feet.

"Christine!" he exclaimed taking both her hands in his. "Is it indeed you!"

Just for one exquisite moment he forgot everything, was only conscious that she was beside him, and that they loved each other, with a love which surpassed even the first bliss of the early days of their betrothal. The next moment, with a horrible revulsion, he remembered the barrier that lay between them. Neither of them spoke; in the stillness they were each conscious of the clear birdlike whistle of an errand boy crossing the bridge. He had caught up one of the prettiest airs in "Haddon Hall"—"To thine own heart be true"!

"Hugh," she said softly, "you told me if ever a time came when there was no one else who could help me more

fitly that I was to come to you. I am driven almost desperate and I have come to claim your promise. Where can we talk quietly?"

"If you will not find it too cold I could row you up the river towards Charlcote," he said. "Later in the week Stratford will be full of excursionists, but there is no one on the river this afternoon, we shall be quite unmolested."

She thought this an excellent plan and let him help her into the boat and spread the plaid over her knees.

"It was by this dear old tartan that I recognised you, at least chiefly by that," she said.

"Like its owner it has seen its best days," said Macneillie with a smile. "But I have the same feeling for it that the fellow in Gounod's song had for his old coat,

> 'Mon viel ami
> Ne nous séparons pas.'"

And he sighed a little as he remembered how in the days of their betrothal he had often taken her under his "plaidie."

A strange, dreamy, unreal feeling crept over Christine as she leant back in the stern, while Macneillie with his strong arms rowed her up the winding river. She almost wished his strokes had not been so long and steady, for it seemed to her as if this heaven of peace and repose would end too swiftly. At last he paused.

"We couldn't well find a more lovely place than this," he said glancing over his shoulder and dexterously guiding the boat in between the grassy bank and the branches of an overhanging willow tree.

"I never saw such a wonderful colour as these new spring shoots of the willow," said Christine, as he drew in his oars and sat down beside her in the stern.

Not a breath of wind stirred the leaves, the flies came out and made a cheerful droning sound as though summer

had already come, a lark was singing far up in the blue vault above, and everywhere the quiet of perfect peace seemed to brood.

Macneillie felt that longer silence was perilous, he had learned to allow himself scant leisure when temptation was rife.

"Tell me now what your trouble is," he said quietly.

"Oh!" she cried vehemently, "it seems like sacrilege even to speak of it in such a place as this where all is so peaceful."

Macneillie, who was very far from being at peace, smiled a little involuntarily.

"The place is well enough," he said glancing round. "But now that we are actually among the 'pendent boughs' it reminds me rather too much of

> 'There is a willow grows aslant a brook.'

It might be the identical spot where Ophelia was drowned."

"I wonder if it is," she said diverted for a minute from her own anxieties. "Poor Ophelia! Somehow I have never cared for acting that part of late years. You spoiled me for all other Hamlets. I have often wondered since, Hugh, how you contrived to get through that last season in London."

"Well it was a rough time," said Macneillie, "for, like the Danish Prince,

> "In my heart there was a kind of fighting
> That would not let me sleep.'

By the end of the season I was as nearly mad as Hamlet feigned to be. But no more of that. It is of the present we must talk not of the past. How can I help you? Has anyone been molesting you?"

"Yes," she faltered. "I will tell you all, and then you will understand."

So in her musical voice, and with that extraordinary charm of manner which made her irresistible, she told him simply and truthfully all the difficulties she had had to contend with. Lastly she told him of Conway Sartoris and of the arguments he had used in his letter.

"They seem to me quite unanswerable," she said, "and he is a man everyone respects, he is far more intellectual than we are, and he doesn't merely theorise, he knows the difficulties of real life. The more I think of it, the more it seems to me that you and I are wrecking our lives and suffering so cruelly all for a mistaken idea,—a sort of fetish-worship for the law of the land."

Macneillie had grown very pale, his hands trembled, but from long force of habit his voice was well under control.

"Sin is lawlessness," he quoted in a low tone.

"Yes, yes," she said quickly. "But this law that parts us, that makes our lives a hell—you say it is an unjust law and ought to be reformed. You said that in your letter."

"I long for its reform with all my heart," he replied. "And the greatest of living statesmen and the most devoted of English Churchmen did his utmost in 1857 to prevent this wicked double standard of morality from ever finding a place in the Divorce Law. He said he would deliberately prefer an increase in the number of cases of divorce to the acceptance of this shameful inequality between men and women."

"And are we patiently and tamely to go on enduring it?" she cried. "Why, surely, all reforms have been won by those who were not afraid to break the bad laws that had no business to exist. Think of your Covenanters who gloriously broke the law and saved their country from tyranny! Almost all heroes and martyrs have broken the law when it deserved to be broken."

"Yes, that is true," he said. "But they only broke it out of obedience to a higher law, they did not break it for their own gain. My dearest," he took her hand and held it closely in his, "though this law cries aloud for reform, let us be law-abiding citizens, and wait."

Her eyes filled with tears, her voice quivered pitifully when after awhile she spoke.

"You talk of waiting, but when one sees how truth and justice are set at naught in parliament,—how with people agonising and dying, and with so much that is wrong to be righted our representatives will haggle miserably for months and years over useless questions, how from sheer spite they will waste the time of the nation, how from party jealousy they will thwart measures,— the thought of waiting grows intolerable."

"But reform is bound to come," said Macneillie, "most of the fair minded people who have studied the matter and who know anything of practical life desire it, we have against us only the narrow minded and the men of vicious life."

"You say *only!*" exclaimed Christine with a laugh that was a sob. "But it is just the narrow good and the vicious bad who work all the misery of the world. Oh, Hugh! I am not strong and brave like you, I am weak and tired and worn out. I cannot live longer without you. I have tried to bear it but I have come to the end of my strength."

She covered her face with her hands, he could see great tears slowly falling between her slender white fingers, and the sight wrung his heart. Yet he did not respond to her appeal. It was not because he failed to understand that bitter cry of exhaustion, it was because he understood it so well, had been indeed for the last few weeks so drearily conscious of just that same feeling that he could endure no longer, that his strength was gone. It was well that Christine could not see his face, for the agonising

struggle which was going on within him was only too clearly visible. In the intense stillness of the calm sunny afternoon it seemed to him that all nature was at rest save themselves, and as in moments of great physical pain some very slight detail will attract the sufferer's attention, so now, while he passed through the most cruel ordeal of his life, Macneillie was watching half unconsciously the pretty movements of a little water-rat which had run up the stem of a bush growing close to the river, and was evidently enjoying itself to the best of its ability. The birds, too, were singing as though in a perfect ecstasy of joy.

Their song contrasted mockingly with the torturing thoughts which filled his mind, and yet nevertheless it was through the joyousness of these lesser creatures that his help was to come. For it carried him back to the thought of a great Teacher who, when speaking to "an innumerable multitude of people," average men and women, tempest-tossed as he was now, had told them that not one single bird was forgotten by God, and had said, "Fear not, ye are of more value than many sparrows."

With that highest courage which in times of dire dismay can rise from what seems like certain defeat, and kindle hope and strength in the hearts of others, and win in a desperate fight, Macneillie gripped the words to his heart and was strong once more, with that trust in God which is man's righteousness.

"I know exactly what you mean," he said, as Christine at length looked up and dried her tears. "Many a time I have felt at the end of my strength. It's just a device of the devil's own making. Depend upon it, God won't take away His gift just when it is most needed. Is it likely He would do that?"

"It seems to me that the devil rules," said Christine. "I can believe in little but evil in the wretched life I have had to live. Here, with you, it is different, I seem another being altogether. You can make me good."

There was truth in what she said. He had always had over her the best possible influence. Without each other they were incomplete.

"And yet," he said, "it is just because I so love and honour you that the arguments of Conway Sartoris which you mentioned just now, clever and plausible though they are, seem contemptible. Shall I let the one I love best in all the world bear shame and reproach? Shall you and I who have tried all these years to be a credit to the profession give such a handle to its enemies? Shall we dare to bring down upon innocent children the curse of illegitimacy? And all because we were too weakly impatient to wait—or too cowardly to suffer? Forgive me, my dear one, I put these things in a blunt way, but are they not things we must think out clearly if we would come safely through this ordeal?"

She looked up in his face, it was singularly beautiful just at the minute, in spite of the havoc which time and suffering had wrought in it. She fancied that he would wear that look of manly courage, of noble strength in his resurrection body. The thought seemed to give her new life. Quietly, indeed with a calmness which surprised herself, she slipped her hand into his; it was done spontaneously as a child slips its hand into that of a trusted companion.

"You are right, Hugh, quite right," she said. "We will wait. You must forgive me for having come here to-day."

"You were only keeping your promise," he said, "and perhaps to talk things out was best for both of us."

He was silent for a few minutes, wondering what could be done to render her life a little more bearable. What was it that had been his own greatest relief during the last few years? Well, undoubtedly, it had been the companionship of Ralph and his wife and little Dick. They were a very fascinating trio and carried about with them an

atmosphere of youth and brightness which was pleasant enough to middle-aged folk sorely burdened with care and trouble. A sudden idea flashed into his mind. Many people are ready to assert that they would lay down their lives for those they love. Macneillie seldom protested in words but had a way of quietly giving up his most treasured possessions, so quietly, indeed, that most people hardly noticed that he did it at all.

"And now," he said, "I am going to ask you to do something for me. Do you recollect a young fellow who was acting with you at Edinburgh four summers ago—Ralph Denmead by name?"

"Why yes, to be sure. I met him only last Sunday at the Herefords. What a nice fellow he seems, and I lost my heart to his dear little wife."

"I am glad you saw them both, they are a delightful couple. Well now, could you possibly get him a London engagement? Would Barry Sterne have any opening for him? It seems to me that there is a very good chance just now for a young romantic actor. We have no really satisfactory Romeo or Orlando."

"But surely you are in no hurry to part with him? I hear he is very popular everywhere."

"For myself I am in no hurry," said Macneillie. "But I should be glad for him to get a London engagement. He deserves it, and then this wandering life is a little hard on his wife and child. They had better settle down, and if they were somewhere in your neighbourhood you would perhaps befriend them. Evereld is a dear little woman, you would like her, and she has the greatest admiration for you."

Christine's face brightened up, it pleased her greatly that he should have asked her to do something for him; she resolved to leave no stone unturned and to do her utmost for his friends.

"I should like to have them near me; you can't think

how lonely it is often," she said. "If it were not for my work and for Charlie's companionship I don't think I could have endured it all this time. The best plan would be for Barry Sterne to see him act. I wonder whether there would be a chance of getting him to run down for one of the performances in the Memorial Week?"

"That is a good idea," said Macneillie. "By the bye, Sterne will scarcely remember it, but the boy did go to him some years ago when he first made up his mind to be an actor. I have often heard him describe the interview. He got cold comfort from Sterne and a most discouraging letter from me. But nothing daunts your real genius. He plodded on, and starved and struggled till things took a turn. And some day if I am not much mistaken he will be one of our leading actors."

"His own opinion is that he owes everything to you," said Christine with a smile. "I heard a great deal about you on Sunday from both of them. I shall be so glad if I can really do anything for people you care for, Hugh. The Denmeads will be quite a new object in life for me."

Those words and the look which went with them were Macneillie's comfort when, shortly after, he parted with Christine. But to stay longer at Stratford with nothing to do had become impossible for him. The river was a haunted place, he dared not go on it again, everything which on his arrival had seemed so peaceful bore upon it now the ineffaceable stamp of the bitter struggle he had passed through.

To go back to his work was directly against the doctor's orders, but go somewhere he must. He packed his portmanteau, and tried to think of any place in the world he wished to see, but could not care even to return to his own country. All things were "weary, stale, flat and unprofitable."

"Fate shall decide," he said to himself with the ghost of a smile playing about his lips. And dragging out an

ancient atlas from the pile of books on the sitting-room table, he opened at the map of Europe and solemnly spun a threepenny bit. After threatening to come to an end in the middle of the German Ocean it finally settled down in Holland.

"Via Harwich and the Hook," said Macneillie pocketing the arbiter of his fate. "So be it. I will run across and see if the bulbs are coming into bloom."

CHAPTER XL

"Be noble! and the nobleness that lies
In other men, sleeping, but never dead
Will rise in majesty to meet thine own;
Then wilt thou see it gleam in many eyes,
Then will pure light around thy path be shed,
And thou wilt never more be sad and lone."—LOWELL.

THE entire change of scene, the vigour of his own mind, and the sturdy resolution with which he laid aside care and anxiety soon restored Macneillie to a great extent. He recovered his power of sleeping, and returned to Stratford to find Ralph and Evereld already settled there and awaiting him with a warmth of welcome which did his heart good. To hear him telling comical stories of his adventures among the Dutch as they lingered over the supper table that first evening, no one would have believed that he had passed through any ordeal whatever, and he seemed quite ready for all the hard work that lay before him.

Indeed Ivy Grant thought him unnecessarily vigorous.

"It's all very well for Mr. Macneillie who has been enjoying a holiday all these weeks, but it's rather hard on us," she protested, "to be kept rehearsing every day till four o'clock, just when we wanted a little free time, too."

For Ivy was rejoicing in the presence of Dermot and Bride O'Ryan, who had come down for the Shaksperian performances, Bride for pleasure, and Dermot chiefly to see Ivy and to write a series of articles for his paper.

Evereld was delighted to have her friend with her and thoroughly enjoyed her first experience of the Memorial week. Stratford had naturally very happy associations for her, and though the weather was not quite so perfect as it had been during their brief honeymoon, it did not affect the audiences which were always large and enthusiastic.

One evening towards the end of the week Bride and Evereld were as usual setting off together for the theatre. There had been rain during the day but the evening was bright and clear so that there was nothing to prevent them from going by the river.

"There is something so delicious in just stepping into the 'Miranda' and being rowed to the very door," said Evereld as she took her place in that same boat in which only a little while before Macneillie and Christine had had their last interview. "It must be like this at Venice."

"Minus the Shaksperian associations and plus the smells," said Bride with a smile. "Here come these vicious swans that look so picturesque and are really so bad tempered. One of them nearly made an end of Dick the other day, according to Bridget."

They glided on peacefully, watching the mellow sunset sky and the church spire and the stately trees surrounding it until the landlord rowed them up to the steps in the garden surrounding the theatre, and here as they climbed the grassy bank they were surprised to come across Macneillie walking to and fro with someone they did not recognise. Evereld wondered much how it came that he was deep in conversation, for it was nearly time for the performance to begin. He seemed somewhat relieved when he caught sight of her and introduced Mr. Barry Sterne, then telling her to see that the attendants gave him a good place, and arranging to meet him later on, he hurried to the Stage door, leaving Evereld and Bride to enjoy the talk of the new comer.

"This looks something like Shakspere worship," he remarked glancing round the perfectly built theatre which was already well filled. "I wish I had here with me the curious old fossil I met to-day in the train. There were a couple of Americans plying him with questions about Stratford; they set upon him the moment we left Euston, and 'Wanted to know' everything. The old gentleman

couldn't get in a word edgeways for some time, what with the tunnels and the sharp fire of questions. At last he remarked stiffly, 'I have never read any of Shakspere's plays myself, but I have always understood that he was a most immoral writer.' You should have seen the faces of the two Yankees! It was as good as a play. And the old fellow was quite unaware that he had said anything extraordinary and blandly went on reading a religious newspaper!"

The play was "As You Like It," and for the first time Ivy was to play the part of Celia and Ralph was to make his first appearance as Orlando. Evereld wondered much what Barry Sterne thought of the performance. He was rather silent at the close of the second act and she was half afraid that he had not approved of it until she found that he had been listening to the criticisms of the people immediately behind them.

"It is to me about the most amusing thing in the world to hear the comments of the public," he said to Evereld. "Your amateur is always such a merciless critic. The less he knows the more scathing will be his fault finding. Now Macneillie's melancholy Jaques is about as fine a piece of acting as one could wish to see, I don't know anyone who makes so much of the character. But those wise-acres behind are carping away because they think it shows what cultured mortals they are."

"It is much the same at the Academy," said Evereld. "The less people know about painting the more severe are their comments."

"If Lear wrote a modern version of his nonsense alphabet it ought to be 'C was the carping cantankerous critic who cavilled and canted of Culture,'" said Barry Sterne with a laugh. "Your husband makes an excellent Orlando. I hear, too, that his Romeo is very good. I suppose you have often seen him in that part?"

"Oh, yes, very often. The last time," she smiled at the

remembrance, "was in the autumn up in the north of England; I shall never forget it. Exactly opposite the theatre on a bit of waste ground, a wild beast show was being held, and it had the most noisy band imaginable. All through the Balcony scene it was thundering out 'The man that broke the bank at Monte Carlo.' And the next night Hamlet had to soliloquise to the strains of 'Daisy Bell.' It was the funniest thing I ever heard!"

Barry Sterne capped this story with a reminiscence of the days when he had been in a travelling company, and by the end of the evening Evereld was ready to consider him the best raconteur she had ever met.

He went round afterwards to Macneillie's dressing-room and Evereld was escorted home by Dermot and Bride, who would not however accept her invitation to supper as they were already engaged to meet Ivy at the Brintons'. The night had turned chilly. Evereld was glad to find a fire awaiting them, and she curled herself up comfortably in an armchair waiting for the return of the men-folk and finishing Black's charming story "Judith Shakspere."

"How long they are to-night!" she exclaimed, when the last page was turned and Judith whose grave she had seen in the chancel of Stratford church only that morning, had been left happily with her lover Tom Quiney. "I shall starve if they don't come soon. What a fire this is for toast! I will make some to pass the time."

After a while steps were heard on the stairs and in came Macneillie and Ralph with apologies for having kept her so long. Macneillie, who was a man with a strong shrinking from any sort of change in his surroundings, felt a pang as he reflected that soon there would be no bright-faced little housekeeper waiting to welcome him, and making a home out of each place they stayed at in their wandering life. He stood warming himself by the fire noticing dreamily the mute caress which passed be-

tween husband and wife, the funny way in which Evereld divided her attention between the perfect toasting of a particular slice of bread, and the discussion of the way in which Orlando had carried Adam in the forest banquet scene, and then her half anxious glance in his direction which seemed to say, "I know you are tired and out of spirits but you shall not be bothered with questions, you shall be fed."

She made them laugh at supper over Barry Sterne's travelling companion who had been sure that Shakspere was a most immoral writer, but she could see that something was troubling Ralph, for instead of being the life of the party he was silent and abstracted.

Macneillie soon solved the mystery, and turning to her with one of his humourous smiles, said, "I am sure you would think to look at him that he had dismally failed or had been half slaughtered by the critics. I assure you, my dear, it's nothing of the sort. He has just had the offer of a very good London engagement."

"What, from Mr. Sterne?" asked Evereld in amazement.

"Yes, they brought out a new piece you know on Easter Monday and it seems that Jack Carrington is again going to prove Ralph's good genius by failing altogether to get hold of the part he has to play. The fact is, Carrington is excellent as far as he goes, but his range is limited, he feels that he will never succeed in this play and Sterne sees it too. They are parting quite amicably, and he wants Ralph to take his place."

"I can't leave you, Governor," said Ralph with a vibration in his voice which made the tears start to Evereld's eyes.

"Oh no," she said eagerly. "Don't let us go—why we belong to you now."

"My dear child," said Macneillie, "don't you go and encourage him in refusing an offer which he ought to

jump at. We have been arguing the matter ever since we parted with Barry Sterne at the station and nothing can I get out of Ralph but protests which quite take me back to Mrs. Micawber. The fact is you two read Dickens to such an extent that you are quite saturated with him. This is an excellent offer and ought to be accepted."

"But I never will, no I never will desert Mr. Macneillie!" quoted Evereld merrily. "Why are you so anxious to get rid of us? You always pretend that you miss us when we are away."

"So I do, my dear, there's no pretence about it," said Macneillie, "but joking apart, it really would be madness to refuse such a chance as this just because we are the best of friends and are very happy together. Moreover there are two special reasons why I want you to accept it. The first I will tell you now, and the second shall be for Ralph presently. I don't deny that I shall miss you horribly, but I shall be happier in the long run to think that you have a home of your own, and I should always reproach myself if Ralph neglected a chance which will probably lead on to fortune. You and I must consider what is best for his career. If he were my own son I should insist on his going, as it is I can only strongly advise it."

They talked for some little time over the proposed change, and then Evereld went to her room leaving the men to argue the matter out at still greater length over their pipes. In her own mind she began to have some vague suspicion of the reason why he was so anxious for them to accept the offer, and later on Ralph confirmed her in this idea. She was still brushing out her sunny brown hair when he came in.

"Well darling, I believe we shall have to go," he said. "Hateful as it will be to leave Macneillie, it is of course a step upward, and he seems really anxious that we should

not lose such a chance. Moreover it is not alone of us that he is thinking. It is of Miss Greville."

"I felt somehow that it was, and yet what difference can it make to her?" said Evereld wonderingly. "I admire her more than I can tell you, but of what possible use can we be to her?"

"Well it's hard to say, but she seems to have told Macneillie that she had taken a great fancy to you the other day when we met her at the Herefords, and then I think he said something about the possibility of some opening in London for me, and naturally she would like to help his friends. Then too from what he told me she must be awfully lonely, and though she tries to lead as retired a life as possible yet difficulties are always cropping up."

"Where does she live?"

"She has had a flat in Victoria Street, but is leaving, Barry Sterne told us. I think he said she had got another flat at Chelsea."

"Could we afford to live in such a neighbourhood as Chelsea?"

"Yes, I think we might if we can find anything suitable, my salary will be better than it is now, and we could furnish by degrees."

"Oh, Ralph! what fun!" cried Evereld her eyes lighting up at the prospect of furnishing, for she was a true woman.

"We would do it very, very economically. We would begin like Traddles and Sophy 'on a Britannia metal footing;' there would always be the Memorial spoons for visitors, you know."

And thus Macneillie's plot prospered exceedingly, and though the wrench of parting was hard, Ralph and Evereld soon settled down very happily in their new quarters, a snug little flat at the very top of the same building at Chelsea in which Christine Greville occupied the first floor, and she could see as much or as little of them as she

liked. She liked to see a great deal of them as it happened, and Evereld and Dick were always ready to come in and companionise Charlie, while Ralph proved himself a most trusty knight-errant, and the happiness of the young husband and wife cheered Christine as it had cheered Macneillie. Those whose lives have been clouded by some grievous trouble are supposed theoretically to hate the sight of happiness; but that is merely a popular fallacy. With the great majority it is an intense relief to come across happiness, the mere sight of it does good, and the happy confer on the sorrowful a real boon by their mere existence.

CHAPTER XLI

"As Thou hast found me ready to Thy call,
Which stationed me to watch the outer wall,
And, quitting joys and hopes that once were mine,
To pace with patient steps this narrow line
Oh! may it be that, coming soon or late,
Thou still shalt find Thy soldier at the gate,
Who then may follow Thee till sight needs not to prove,
And faith will be dissolved in knowledge of Thy love."

G. J. ROMANES.

IT was in July, while Macneillie was spending his summer holiday at Callander, that his mother's sudden death made him more than ever alone in the world. They had passed together a particularly happy fortnight, and though he could see that she was gradually getting more infirm she had never known a day's illness, and her loss came as a terrible shock to him.

Ralph and Evereld were able to come down to the funeral, for the London season was just over and he was glad to have them with him for ten days before he started once more on tour. He was thinking of selling the house and furniture, but Ralph who knew what pains he had spent in building it, and how sad the dispersal of all his old home belongings must be, persuaded him to leave things much as they were and content himself with letting it as a furnished house for the summer months.

For a time the presence of the Denmeads cheered him a good deal. He enjoyed hearing every detail of their life in London, and he insisted on taking them to the Pass of Leny that he might show Evereld the exact spot where he had first come across her husband. Each morning, too, they used to tramp up the road leading to the well and Ralph would read aloud from "Marius the Epicurean," while Evereld made a sketch which Macneillie had long desired:—the rough moorland road in the foreground leading to the crest of the hill; on either side a

stretch of purple heather; the hint of a valley down below where Callander lay hidden and, in the distance, a range of blue Scottish mountains which he said would make him breathe "caller" air only to look at.

"I shall take it with me wherever I go," he said. "There is no reason why wayfaring men shouldn't have a few possessions of their own. Besides I have foresworn the travelling clock. It is no good to me since you have gone, for I can never remember to wind it, so there is one thing less to pack."

"It was here in this identical place that you coached me that summer after I was ill," said Ralph. "I connect it with Florizel, and Claudio, and Fabian, and with that Scotch play Miss Greville was acting in at Edinburgh."

"Yes, and taking him altogether he was a very amenable pupil," said Macneillie smiling at Evereld. "I wish I could say as much for his successor."

But unfortunately a second Ralph Denmead proved hard to find. And Macneillie had a very discouraging time of it all through August and September. The weather was unusually hot and even in the watering-places that they visited the audiences were seldom good. Then came a spell of very wet weather, but the houses were still poor, and it seemed that no one cared for Shakspere, that old English Comedy ceased to attract and that the restless spirits of modern people required something much more highly seasoned.

Nourished on skimmed newspaper, hashed review articles, minced magazines in the form of summaries, and short stories of dubious morality, was it likely that their brains could be in a condition to receive good wholesome literary food?

Macneillie had long been aware that a wave of evil tendency was passing over literature and the drama, he had struggled on, never allowing it to influence his choice of plays, sure that in time the "evil on itself would back recoil," and faithful to his own conviction of what was a

manager's duty. But he began now to think that, before the force of this wave of uncleanness had spent itself, it would altogether submerge his fortune and leave him a ruined man.

One of the things that tried him most severely was the timidity of those who should have been his best supporters. The clergy with a few noteworthy exceptions fulminated against the evil plays but failed to support the good. He knew that hundreds of them would troop to Washington's theatre when they went to London, but they were generally conspicuous by their absence from the theatres in their own towns where their presence might really have done much good. Personally they respected him and spoke of him in warm terms, but very few of them at all understood how hard a fight this man was making in a time of exceptional difficulty, or how bitter it was to him when those, from whom he reasonably expected much, held aloof.

It was quite the end of September when the Macneillie Company found themselves once more at Liverpool. They were giving the plays they had performed at Stratford during the Memorial week, and this made Macneillie feel the loss of Ralph more acutely than ever. To turn straight from a pupil who had been extraordinarily receptive, always good-humoured, always ready to study, and grudging no pains in the effort to please his instructor and conquer his own faults, to a man of exactly the opposite type, was hard indeed. It was all the more annoying to Macneillie because Ralph's successor had excellent abilities but was cursed with the conviction that he already knew everything a little better than the Manager; he had moreover been born with one of those touchy and wayward natures that are so hard to deal with. He lived in a perpetual state of taking offence, and though Macneillie apparently ignored this and went quietly on his way, it nevertheless chafed him a good deal.

Then, too, all the many vicissitudes of a travelling company—the illness of one, the quarrels of another—seemed to worry him more now that he was alone and had no one to discuss things with. The very rooms he occupied in Seymour Street were full of memories to him; he had stayed there more than once with Ralph and Evereld, it had been there that they had first come to him after their marriage, and the place looked horribly blank without them.

By the Thursday morning of their stay he was in the lowest spirits. For three nights they had played to wretchedly bad houses owing to counter attractions elsewhere; his old trouble of sleeplessness was returning and he felt ill and horribly depressed as he walked down through the wet dingy streets to the Shakspere Theatre. There was a rehearsal of Romeo and Juliet, and the insolent manner and insufferable conceit of the Juvenile Lead proved just the last straw. After going through some great agony in life, and going through it well and bravely we are sadly apt to break down under some quite trifling strain. A petty thing will irritate us absurdly in the reaction after great distress, and Macneillie lost his temper now and scolded the offending actor right royally. When an habitually quiet, self-restrained man does lose his temper he usually does it with great thoroughness. Romeo was impressed as he might have been by a sudden thunder storm on a winter's day, but those who really knew the Manager were troubled at such an unwonted scene, and Ivy glanced at him with the conviction that his health was again breaking down.

It was an uncomfortable rehearsal and Macneillie went back to Seymour Street doubly depressed. His thoughts turned to that April afternoon at Stratford on the river. He had been strong then, but

> "It is very good for strength
> To know that someone needs you to be strong."

Christine's presence, though in one sense it had been his most severe trial, had been in another an incentive to endure. To-day, in his lonely room with food before him which he could not touch, with a brain exhausted by want of rest, and harassed by a hundred cares and annoyances, he came perilously near to yielding. For that was the worst of it. The struggle was not one to be gone through once and for all, it was constantly recurring. And always he had the consciousness that Christine's reverence for law was weaker than his own, that she would quickly yield to his lightest word. It was moreover so fatally easy to go to her, so hard to be loyal to that shamefully unfair law of the land which should be reformed.

To check his thoughts he took up one of the London papers. The first thing that met his eye was the announcement that Sir Matthew Mactavish had died in the distant place of refuge which he had succeeded in gaining. And almost immediately afterwards he noticed a paragraph in which was a brief account of the marriage of the Honourable Herbert Vane-Ffoulkes to Lady Dunlop-Tyars, widow of the late Sir John Dunlop-Tyars, Bart.

He smiled a little over the memories evoked by those names, but the dark cloud soon stole over him once more.

"Villains can die," he thought to himself, "and empty-headed fools can marry, but I must still drag on this death in life!"

Then fiends' voices began to urge him to give up: mocking fiends who jeered at his obsolete notions of right and wrong: practical fiends who would have had him cease a vain endeavor to keep up an impossible standard of morality, and from thenceforth pander to the depraved taste of the public; shrewd fiends who argued plausibly enough that his health was breaking down and that it was high time to yield.

Macneillie with an effort roused himself and for a while

baffled them by taking a brisk walk; it was cold and wet and dreary but the exercise was a relief and by the time he had reached the Seaforth Sands he had regained his composure. The struggle was for the time over, but existence looked to him as wretched, as cheerless, as that wild desolate country at the entrance to the Mersey. The rain too began to come down remorselessly, and he made his way to the station of the electric railway and returned by the docks to the city. As he was walking along Church Street he chanced to come across Ralph's friend George Mowbray.

"I am just going to the Art Gallery," he observed. "Bicycling is hopeless to-day, the tires do nothing but slip."

"I will come with you," said Macneillie, not because he cared in the least to see the pictures, but from sheer dread of having spare time on his hands.

He had never before contrived to see the Walker Art Gallery and as he wandered drearily round the place, seeing yet hardly heeding the treasures it contains, his attention was at length arrested by Poynter's well-known picture "Faithful unto Death." He was of course familiar with the story of the sentinel of Pompeii whose skeleton was discovered, hundreds of years later, standing on guard at his gate. But he never realised till he saw that picture how awful must have been the man's temptation to escape and save himself as all the rest were doing. Behind him were only two or three flying figures, most of the citizens must already have fled; but before him, and drawing very near, was the awful lurid glow which meant certain death. The sentinel stood facing it, he was perfectly upright, perfectly calm, only in the strong tension of the muscles of the hand one could see how instinctively he gripped the sword which could now avail him nothing. In his dilated eyes there was no abject terror but a great awe, an intensely human look of dread of the swiftly ap-

proaching fiery foe. It would have been an easy thing to desert his post and disobey orders. Had it ever come into his mind as he gazed across the campagna to Vesuvius that self preservation was permissible under such circumstances? That a soldier need not always obey his captain's orders? Perhaps it had, but nevertheless he had stood firm and had died in what no doubt seemed a useless fashion, out of reverence to mere law, never dreaming that his example would give courage and strength to millions of people in the ages to come.

Macneillie turned away thoughtfully, his mind at work on that old, old problem of evil and suffering, of the possible gain to others through the inexplicable pain of the world.

The thought of it haunted him as he wrote business letters in his lonely room, as he went about his work that night at the theatre, as he looked with a sense of dull disappointment and depression at the rows of empty stalls, and reflected how much hard toil and careful preparation had been thrown away on an enterprise by which he was daily losing money. Someone brought an evening paper into the green room, he glanced hurriedly at an account of the new play shortly to be produced by Barry Sterne; he read a few lines as to the part Christine was to take, and was pleased by a brief allusion to the success Ralph had had in the summer. But as he went back to his rooms a weary distaste for his work in the provinces came over him, he longed as he had never longed before to be back in London, to be working once more with his old comrades.

The dismal rain still fell in a drizzle, the flaring lights in the public house at the corner of Wild Street were reflected garishly in the wet pavement. A little further on as he crossed London Road he came upon a small crowd grouped about a tram car, and paused listlessly to see what was wrong. The horses were vainly struggling

to make good their footing on the slippery road; they stumbled and plunged and strained, but the uphill way was too much for them, the car slipped back and for a minute the passengers seemed in some peril.

Macneillie drew nearer and spoke to the conductor who was at the horses' heads doing his utmost to urge them on.

"Is the load too heavy for them?" said Macneillie.

"Bless you, no sir," said the man, "they've done it scores of times, but it's a strain on 'em when the road's slippery, and this 'ere roan 'e'es afraid of coming down. It's just panic sir, nothing more, 'e can do it fast enough."

Macneillie stroked the neck of the frightened horse, he had a fellow feeling for it.

"We can't have the line blocked or the passengers upset," said the driver, with an oath which appeared to refresh him greatly. "Come on mate, he must do it. Take the whip and keep alongside of him thrashing him as we go."

At last with much ado the car was in motion once more, and the poor roan, kicking and plunging, was dragged and flogged up the hill.

"Oh, how could you let them be so cruel, Mr. Macneillie!" said Ivy who, on her way back to her rooms with Helen Orme, had witnessed the same scene.

"Well my dear, I liked it as little as you did," said the Manager. "But what was to be done? The load was not too great, it was merely that the horse was frightened, and there was no persuading it that it would not come to grief. Like the rest of us it would insist on thinking of the hill in front of it, instead of concentrating its mind on the next step. You see while you anathematised the driver I, like the melancholy Jaques, did 'moralize this spectacle.'"

They laughed and bade him good night, but Ivy looked rather anxiously after him as, having seen them to their door, he recrossed Seymour Street to his lodgings a little further up.

"Nell," she said to her companion, "how very ill Mr. Macneillie looks to-night. I think he will break down altogether."

"Oh, I hope not," said Helen Orme. "I think he is only depressed. He has lost his mother lately you see, and besides I'm sure there is plenty to account for depression with such houses as we have had lately."

Meanwhile Macneillie had reached his desolate rooms. He had been thinking of the Stratford performances, of Ralph's brilliant success, of the crowded theatre;—it seemed to him that he ought now to have found a sweet-faced little housekeeper sitting by the fire and making toast, that there ought to have been a welcoming glance from Evereld's truthful blue eyes. Instead there was an empty room and a fireless grate and a solitary meal awaiting him. He sat down and ate dutifully but quite without appetite. He forced himself to remember how much better it was that Ralph and Evereld should be near Christine; but the more he thought the more that horrible craving to be there too assailed him.

And presently, for the first time in his life, a feeling of deadly faintness came over him; he staggered into his bedroom. The gas was turned low, the window which was at the back of the house had been left wide open, he breathed more freely and leant for some minutes against the shutter, vaguely conscious of the night sky and of the dark outline of the neighbouring buildings. In his eyes there was the same look of awe—of a great human dread—which makes the eyes of the Pompeian sentinel so pathetic. He had endured long and patiently, had thought little of the effect on himself, but now the dread of an utter failure of health seized him, and he knew that it was no idle fancy but a very real peril which must be bravely faced.

And yet better, a thousand times better, the wreck of body and mind than the failure to be a law-abiding citi-

zen. Better this cruel absence from the woman he loved than faithlessness to what he knew to be right.

"There is not a pin to choose between me and that tram-car horse!" he reflected, pulling down the blind and turning up the gas with a humourous smile flickering even then about his pale lips. "The way is slippery and there's a hill to be climbed,—it is collar work, but a step at a time may do it safely after all. Anyhow I will put 'a stiff back to a stubborn brae.'"

He paused for a minute to look at Evereld's water colour sketch of the moorland road, and to breathe "caller" air as he glanced at the heather and at the blue mountains beyond the hidden valley.

He would go on patiently as a wayfaring man should do; and perchance in time—oh, how he longed and prayed for that time!—the unjust law would be reformed, and he and Christine might find rest and a home in that hidden valley of the future. In any case no one could rob them of their inheritance beyond.

Not, however, until he turned the picture over and read the quotation from "Marius the Epicurean" which he had written at Callander on the back of it, did his usual look of quiet strength return to him.

The words were these:—"Must not the whole world around have faded away from him altogether, had he been left for one moment really alone in it? In his deepest apparent solitude there had been rich entertainment. It was as if there were not one only, but two wayfarers, side by side."

THE END

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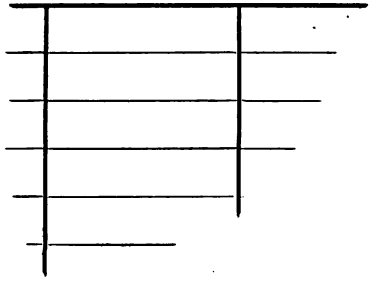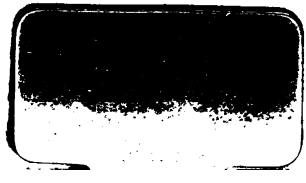
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